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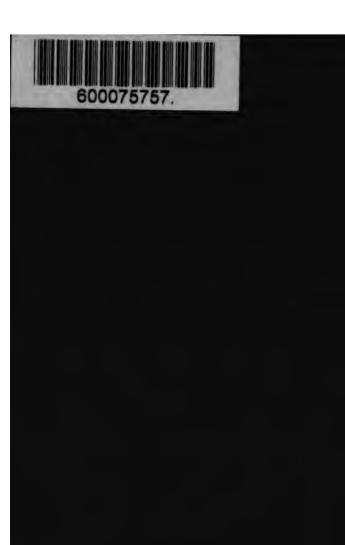
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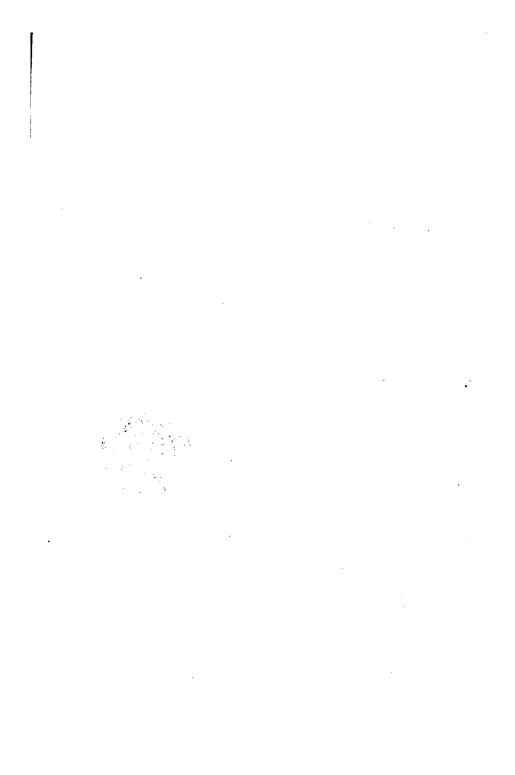






BESSIE.

VOL. III.



BESSIE.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"NATHALIE," "ADELE," "SILVIA,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON: HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET. 1872.

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249. 9. 315.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY MACDONALD AND TUGWELL, BLENHEIM HOUSE.

BESSIE.

CHAPTER I.

THE curtain often drops on the stage of life, and the wearied actors in the drama rest awhile before they begin anew. So it was with us; the deepest lull followed that tempest of passion. Late Summer ripened into Autumn, and Autumn yielded to wintry frosts and snows, and still we lived on at the old house in Fontainebleau, none of us, not even Mr. de Lusignan, I believe, knowing why we stayed there. He, to be sure, did not find our solitude irksome, for every now and then he was missing from the breakfast-table, "business" having suddenly taken him off to Paris, or even to London.

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"Dear, dear!" Elizabeth would say, mockingly, when Mademoiselle quietly gave us this account of Mr. de Lusignan's doings, "what a very busy man the poor gentleman is!"

To which remark Mademoiselle never returned any sort of answer. It was lucky that we none of us disliked this quiet and lonely life, in a strange place and a strange country. Elizabeth and I were friends again—not as we had been once, but friends enough to make our companionship pleasant. It had been more than that in the days that were gone by; then I had told her every thought that passed through me; and now she had taught me to keep my own counsel, and I had taken the lesson to heart, and not forgotten it.

I could not. I had lost my lover and my friend, James Carr and Mr. Herbert, but I never mentioned either to her, often as I thought of them. I wondered how James Carr fared in his new home, and how Mr. Herbert was getting on in his battle with the world; but I had voluntarily given up James, and voluntarily too Mr. Herbert had bid me an adieu which he

intended as final; what then had my thoughts to do with them?—and would not Elizabeth have scoffed, or, at least, wondered at me, if I had broached the subject? Besides, I could not. I remembered how the jealousy of James seemed to have wakened that of Elizabeth; and during the long Winter I speculated, sadly enough, upon the possibility of my having been the cause of that sudden estrangement between her and her lover which neither he nor she had ever explained to me!

All this I kept to myself. Elizabeth did not even know a hope which I then cherished, all the more fondly that it was the only ray of sunshine which pierced the dull cloud of my grief. As I recovered slowly from the fever which had laid me so low, my guardian had spoken of going to Ireland, and taking me with him.

I suppose I have a traditionary sort of mind, a mind much out of fashion in these days, I am told—a mind that looks back to the past, and loves its historical country and unknown kindred. For Ireland, about which I knew little

or nothing, attracted me wonderfully. I wanted to look at it, to see what it was like, and so this careless promise of my guardiau's became the one thing that I thought of. I had relations in Ireland; I did not know where they were—never mind, I should be sure to find them out, through one of those wonderful chances which play so large a part in the story of the young. I mean that story woven out of their own brains, which steps so gaily before them in the path of life, walking on tip-toe through the thorns and briers, or dancing like a mote in the sunshine.

Now one bleak morning, late in March, I was following that pleasant vision with more zeal than discretion, when a ruthless hand tore the flimsy cobweb to pieces. We were all taking our breakfast—that is to say, Mademoiselle was reading a letter which she had just received; Elizabeth, looking lovely and dreamy, was drinking her coffee; my guardian was breaking the shell of his third egg; and I—having first eaten my buttered toast, and drunk my one cup of tea—was going through that

series of marvellous coincidences, thanks to which I was recovering a missing aunt and three lost cousins, all good, warm-hearted girls, when Mr. de Lusignan said—

- "I hope it will not take you long to pack up, Mignonne?"
- "Oh! are we really going?" I cried, with a joyous start.
- "You are going, Bessie," he rather drily answered.
 - "To Ireland?" I suggested dubiously.
- "I did not utter the word Ireland," he replied, very disagreeably.

Consternation must have been written in my face, but my guardian did not care for such mute language.

- "And where are we going?" I asked faintly.
- "To England." He spoke shortly, and rose as he spoke, walked to the fireplace, and took up a newspaper. I looked at Mademoiselle. She answered the look with one of tranquil gravity. She was not taken by surprise, if I was. From her I turned to Elizabeth—she stirred her coffee with her spoon very quietly; but I fancied I

saw the rebellious curl of her dainty lip; my hopes rose at once.

"Oh! dear, what a disappointment!" I exclaimed, with sudden petulance.

"What!" said my guardian, looking at me over the edge of his newspaper with genuine surprise.

"I am so disappointed!" I persisted, looking at Elizabeth, who went on stirring her coffee and made no sign, at which my heart fell somewhat. "I did hope to see Ireland," I resumed; "but of course you like going to England best."

Mr. de Lusignan laughed.

"I am not going there at all," he said, curtly. "I am going to Spain."

Elizabeth just raised her head for a moment, and looked straight before her through the window. It seemed to me as if a half sigh of relief passed through her parted lips, but that was all.

"Then you send us to England?" I resumed, in an aggrieved tone, feeling indeed quite ready to cry with vexation and annoyance. "I sup-

pose you like it?" I added, looking reproachfully at Mademoiselle.

"I am not going, my dear," she answered, very quietly.

I looked at Elizabeth—she was silent, not merely silent in speech, but silent and impenetrable in aspect as any stone Sphinx of the desert. I began to feel rather frightened. Had I done wrong? Had I been naughty, and was I now punished and exiled alone to England? I was not compelled to put the question.

"Mrs. Henry and you are going together," resumed Mr. de Lusignan.

Surely Elizabeth would never tolerate being thus disposed of? I turned to her, for if I was a rebel, she was my chief, without whom I could not act; but again my appealing eyes met with no response. My captain went on stirring her coffee. Either the cause was lost, or—I clung fondly to that secret hope—the decisive moment for action had not come. So I submitted with a "Very well, I shall pack up," that meant "I cannot help myself, you know."

I went up to my room, and looked about me

rather disconsolately. Now that I was not going to Ireland, I clung to this temporary nest with sudden regret. It seemed as if something of myself must remain in the home I was leaving. The window which had let in sky and sunshine to me, these silent walls that had heard and would keep my counsel so faithfully when I was gone, that narrow floor, which was to me as the deck of a ship is to the captain, my little world whereof I was sole and sovereign mistress—all these surely were as a portion of myself, and would leave me the poorer for our parting. But it must be. Our autocrat had spoken, and all I had to do was to pack up at once. Before I began, however, I thought I might as well see what Elizabeth was doing. I went to her room, and found her standing over Watkins, who was methodically shaking out, and then carefully folding up, a beautiful and costly lace shawl. The bed, the chairs, were covered with articles of wearing apparel; and a large trunk, studded with nails, and looking armed cap-à-pie for railway encounters, stood wide open on the floor.

That Mademoiselle and I should submit to Mr. de Lusignan's will, was a matter of course; but this sudden compliance of his rebellious daughter-in-law's surprised me, and also destroyed all the latent hopes I had placed in her ultimate resistance.

"How do you like it, Elizabeth?" I asked, rather crossly.

"Like what, Bessie?" she composedly replied; "the packing up? Oh! yes, I am so fond of it. Packing up, removing to a new house, and buying and selling, are my delight. Take care, Watkins. You really must get some silk paper. I told you so at once."

She spoke very shortly, and was so much engrossed by the necessity of silk paper that she scarcely gave me a look. I left her dispirited and crestfallen.

My store of worldly goods was not superabundant in those days, so my packing-up could not take me more than a few hours. I set about it at once, for Mr. de Lusignan's wishes were so many whirlwinds, which swept everyone and everything before them. Since he wanted

to go to Spain, he could not hurry us too quickly away from Fontainebleau. And yet this wish of his amazed me much. Was he so sure of Elizabeth now that he thus let her and the boy out of his reach, not even keeping the safeguard of Mademoiselle's presence over her? Another question perplexed me when I thought about it. Had Mr. de Lusignan a home in England, that he sent us to it?—and if he had not, whither could we possibly be going? It had not occurred to me to put these questions at the proper time, and the information which I now got from Mademoiselle nearly took my breath away, so great was my surprise. She came to my room to give me that needful knowledge, just as I sat down, rather tired and a little out of breath with my packing.

"Has Mr. de Lusignan told you to whom he sends you, Mignonne?" she asked, sitting down on a little chair by the window.

"Then we are not going to Portland Place?" I said doubtfully.

"There is no Portland Place now," she answered with a sigh. "I do not know if Mr. de

Lusignan will ever have a home in England, or anywhere, again."

I made no comment, but waited.

- "You are going to Miss Russell's," she pursued.
- "Surely not to Mr. Herbert's Miss Russell?" I cried, amazed.
- "Yes, my dear, to her. Did you not know she was an old friend of Mr. de Lusignan's? She feels dull, I believe, and has asked Mrs. Henry, the child, and you to go and spend a few weeks with her. She resides for the present in a rather lonely house in ——shire. The country around is beautiful, and your stay will not be so long as to allow you to feel very dull, Mignonne."

"My goodness!" I exclaimed, still dismayed, "what takes us to that old Miss Russell's?"

Mademoiselle laughed. "Old Miss Russell is much younger than I am," she said—"old Miss Russell is barely forty."

"Well, but what takes us to her?" I said, piteously. "She does not know us, and how can she care for us?"

"I believe we were all to go; but Mr. de Lusignan has other views for himself, and Miss Russell's invitation is very convenient just now. But he will not leave you long out of his sight, and, as I said before, you will not have time to feel dull. But, though I really think you will find Miss Russell's house a pleasant house in many respects, I wish to utter a few words of warning before we part. It is hard to say so to so young a thing as you are, Mignonne," she added, looking at me very kindly, "but you must be on your guard in that house. Miss Russell has her peculiarities, and you must be careful—not to humour them, an angel could not do that-but to avoid making mischief. Forget, Mignonne-forget as much as you can."

- "Forget what?" I asked, rather bluntly.
- "Everything that concerns yourself and other people, Mignonne. Let there be no past for the five or six weeks you are to spend there let it be all present or future, but past never."

She spoke so emphatically that I was a little startled.

"Oh! Elizabeth will manage all that," I said, in some alarm. "You know how clever she is; and I—really, Mademoiselle, I am quite stupid in those things."

Mademoiselle looked at me and sighed.

"My dear," she said quietly, "rely on yourself alone in this as in other things. Never put your prudence, any more than your conscience, in the keeping of another. Mrs. Henry is very beautiful, and very amiable; but is she prudent?"

I felt the force of the argument. No, Elizabeth was not prudent—that was true enough. Men and women of strong wills rarely are; but then she was so clever. Besides, though Mademoiselle's warning impressed me whilst it was being uttered, another thought far more engrossing rose to my lips, in words which, however, were not spoken. How was it that Elizabeth, so long and so jealously guarded, was thus suddenly set free? I longed to put the question, but did not know how to frame it; and whilst I thus hesitated, Mademoiselle rose and left me, merely saying:

"We go to-morrow morning, you know."

And we did go. The next morning we bade Fontainebleau adieu. I went early into the forest, to look around me once more. A tempestuous wind was blowing through the leafless trees, and along the shadowless avenues, above which big grey clouds were flying. green world which I had seen so gay, which had been so full of the song of happy birds, was now both cold and mute. Yet I turned away from it with a sort of sorrow. It seemed as if many a happy day were staying there for ever behind I had paid those days their full price, true, and bought them rather dear, but what of that? They had been mine, and who knew what the future held in store? But youth has many a secret hope ever whispering in its ear, and where is the use of recording, now that life has told its tale, all that Hope said to me, as we walked back together to the house of the fair Gabrielle?

CHAPTER II.

WE parted from Mr. de Lusignan in Paris, where we spent a week, and from Mademoiselle in Boulogne. It was to be a brief separation, and yet the tears rose to my eyes as I stood on the deck with my hand in hers; but there was a sort of passion in the way in which Elizabeth kissed her, left her, then came back and kissed her again.

"God bless you, my dear!" said Mademoiselle, kindly, but with a quiet smile on her pleasant face. "I shall not waken Harry, since he has chosen to fall asleep at the awkward moment."

She glanced towards the child, who, tired with the journey, had laid his little sallow face on Watkins's shoulder, and was sleeping there.

"Write to me soon," she added, turning towards me. The bell rang. There was the usual confusion, and Mademoiselle left us. I looked after her till I could see her no more, and, when I turned back to Elizabeth, I found her standing by me, with the sea-breeze blowing back her black veil from her face, and a look in her eyes, and a smile on her lips, that filled me with surprise. I touched her arm and said:

- "Elizabeth, how glad you look!"
- "It's the sea-air," she answered; and indeed her cheeks were as fresh as the brightest roses.
- "Yes; but how very glad you do look!" I persisted.
- "Then I am glad, I suppose," she answered, so shortly, though not unkindly, that I felt silenced.

Adventure, unless in the awful form of collision, seems to be blotted out of railway travelling. We escaped that unpleasant variety, and our journey to ——shire was both easy and monotonous. We rested for an hour at a hotel in London, and during that hour Elizabeth went out.

"I must get some gloves," she said to me,

with unusual communicativeness; but she did not ask me to accompany her. Indeed, her hand was on the door as she spoke.

Harry was cross and tired, and would have nothing to do with me. I left him to Watkins, and went to the window. It was raining hard, and a gusty wind, which April had borrowed from March, was blowing shrilly among the chimney-tops. London looked very black, grim, and dismal, after the clear skies of France. I turned away with a sigh, and found Watkins and Harry at war. Harry had taken a slip of paper from Elizabeth's "Bradshaw" on the table, and would make what he called "a 'Ock of it." Watkins remonstrated, but Harry carried matters with a high hand, and would have prevailed but for me. I took the paper from him, thrust it into my pocket, and, heedless of his black looks, took up "Bradshaw," for want of better reading.

Elizabeth came in before the hour was out, and threw a pair of gloves on the table.

"They must do for you, Watkins," she said.
"They will certainly never do for me. I hate
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London for that. Shop people will make you buy—tiresome things!"

"But, Elizabeth, how could you be persuaded into buying these gloves?" I exclaimed, looking at them. "They are twice too large! How could you——"

"Oh! because I am a simpleton," she interrupted, carelessly. "Well, we are going, I suppose. The railway waiting-room is as good as this."

Night was falling when we reached Hanvil Station, a little lonely station as ever was. We were the only passengers who alighted, and thus ascertained at once that our luggage was missing. Only my trunks had escaped the calamity, but both Elizabeth's were gone.

"But the luggage must be found," imperiously said Elizabeth, turning on the railway attendant. "I have not got a thing to wear."

Spite this irresistible argument, the trunks were not found. It was plain, though quite inexplicable, that they had remained behind.

"There never was anything so vexing," said Mrs. Henry, addressing the world in general. "My child has literally nothing but what is upon him."

The station-master promised to send an inquiring telegram directly, and with that promise we must needs be satisfied. Miss Russell's carriage had been waiting for us all this time; we entered it, and drove away at once.

- "How vexations!" I began, full. of condolence for Elizabeth's trouble. "I hope your luggage is not lost."
 - "I hope not."
- "Only, Elizabeth, how can it have gone away? Do you know, I think it must be at the hotel."
- "Oh! where is the use of worrying about that?" she interrupted, leaning back in the carriage. "I believe you have a few things of Harry's in your bag, have you not, Watkins?"
 - "Yes, ma'am, I have."
 - "Oh! very well, I can wait."

I felt silenced. Elizabeth shut her eyes in weary indifference to everything around her; but the world, under all its aspects, was still a splendid picture-book to me, and I looked out of the carriage window as eagerly as if the darkness, which was fast coming down, were never to be raised again from the pastoral-looking landscape through which we were driving. At length we reached a square black mass, that lit suddenly as we drew up in front of it; there was a deep baying of dogs, a door flew open, figures moved in the hall, and a low voice said, in tones that were very sweet and clear:

"I am so glad you came to-night. I hope you had not a rough passage."

I could not help starting as I recognised Miss Dunn's unmistakable voice.

"Thank you," carelessly answered Elizabeth, who alighted first, "we got on very well. Give me Harry, Watkins."

I tried not to be stiff with Miss Dunn when I alighted and confronted her, but cordiality was not in my power. She, however, was sweet as a May morning.

"Miss Russell will be so glad!" she said, with her winning smile, "and she has been so anxious the whole day. She is rather poorly now, asleep on the sofa, and I daresay you will prefer going up to your room before dinner. We do not dine for half an hour yet."

This civil dismissal of Miss Dunn's to our respective bedrooms took place in the hall, but unluckily the polite part of it received the flattest contradiction from a sharp, middle-aged voice, which, issuing from the room on our right—the door had remained ajar—said emphatically,

"We do not dine for another hour, Miss Dunn."

"Oh! not for another hour," remarked Miss Dunn, by no means disconcerted. "How nice! You will have the right time to rest—half an hour is not enough."

I do not know how Elizabeth, who, if she looked very lovely, also looked very stately, would have answered Miss Dunn's commonplaces, if Harry had not wakened, and begun screaming with startling suddenness. We all hurried upstairs. Elizabeth, Watkins, and the culprit disappeared through one door, whilst another was opened for me by a neat little maid in a white cap. This good genius soon

vanished, to return with hot water; after which I remained alone in a blue chintz bedroom, with two pale wax lights burning on the toilet-table, and my trunk standing before me on the floor.

I went to the window. The moon was up, hunting with angry haste black clouds, that fled in fear before her. The wind helped her on with a hollow blast that passed like a tempest through the trees below. In the garden all was black and white, and everything had so weird a look that I dropped the blind which I had raised, and went back to my toilet-table. I stood there, looking at my room, and feeling as if I must needs be its first guest, so little token did its blue chintz bed, chairs, and curtains, and, above all, its irreproachable decorum and exact neatness, give one of a predecessor.

"What a formal old maid Miss Russell must be!" I thought, with secret uneasiness and awe.

An old maid Miss Russell undoubtedly was, but formal her bitterest enemies could not call her. I was dressed and ready when Elizabeth came in for me. "Oh! you have got the young ladies' room," she said, glancing round her—"blue and girlish. Mine is crimson. Don't look so frightened, Bessie," she added, kindly, "Miss Russell is sure to behave well, since we are in her house."

We went down together; but, spite this encouraging assurance, I kept behind Elizabeth, and whilst she entered first, I lingered on the threshold of the drawing-room. What subtle magic is that which paints both so keenly and so charmingly for the eyes of youth? The lines which later grow so faint are very clear; the colours which become so dull are very vivid to these young eyes. As I stood thus behind Elizabeth, I caught a glimpse of a picture which, though brief, was so bright that years have not effaced it. In a yellow damask armchair sat a dark-haired and dark-eyed woman, with her hands folded lightly on her lap, and the light of a blazing wood fire shining full on her sallow face. Opposite her sat Miss Dunn, pale and colourless, spite that burning glow. Both were silent; neither moved nor looked round at the opening of the door. It was as if

they were both under a spell, to sit thus, mute and motionless, on either side of that fiery hearth. At length, and as Elizabeth stepped across the floor, Miss Russell turned towards her, and, without rising, smiled, and stretched out her hand in welcome. "I am glad to see you," she said, in a voice which, though somewhat harsh, was not unkind. "It is very good of you to come to a lonely misanthrope—and of Miss Carr, too," she added, giving me a gracious bend of her dark head. "You are scarcely altered," she resumed, looking hard at Elizabeth—"I suppose I can't say anything kinder."

"I suppose not," answered Elizabeth, with a careless laugh; and I thus learned—to my great surprise—that she and Miss Russell were old acquaintances. "And so you have lost your luggage?" continued the lady of the house.

"So tiresome!" murmured Miss Dunn, in ready condolence.

"Yes," coolly answered Elizabeth. "I shall have to dine in my travelling-dress—very tiresome, as you say, Miss Dunn."

"But how did it get lost?" resumed Miss Dunn.

"Oh! it is not lost—only astray."

"My dear Mrs. de Lusignan," remarked Miss Russell, "I do not wish to be depressing, but everything that is lost begins by being astray."

"Well, then, I shall buy new things, and have a change," answered Elizabeth, with much composure; for if there was a thing she disliked, it was being pitied.

Miss Russell turned to me.

"Did you leave Mr. de Lusignan quite well, Miss Carr?" she inquired—"by the way, you excuse me, I hope, for receiving you thus sitting, but you know, of course, that I have no legs.

My confusion at this unexpected piece of information equalled my surprise; and Miss Russell evidently enjoyed both.

"Dear, dear, and did no one tell you?" she exclaimed, in pretended amazement. "Well," she added, with engaging candour, "I may as well open my closet, and show you the skeleton at once. I have got a murderer in my family.

You would feel awkward if you learned it later. And now, Miss Dunn, I think we'll have our dinner."

A servant in black came and wheeled Miss. Russell's chair into the dining-room, where we sat down to a repast which showed that, like my guardian, Miss Russell set her full value on the good things of this world.

"I am a misanthrope," she said to me, "but I keep a good cook."

She was more than a misanthrope, as I soon discovered. She was profoundly independent. She was shrewd and clever enough, after a certain fashion, but very ignorant for a woman of her birth and property. Her money had only helped to give her the coolest self-confidence in the way of assertion which I ever met in anyone. There was positive intrepidity in some of her statements, and once she had said a thing she stuck to it unflinchingly. Books had taught her nothing, for she never read; and she was so generous, not to say lavish, that even the most disinterested of those who came near her could not help letting her have her way.

"She was so kind, poor thing, and so afflicted. Besides, it really was no use contradicting her, you know."

And it really was not. I believe the presence of strangers acted as a stimulant upon her, and drew out her peculiarities, for I was more struck with them on this first evening than during the rest of our stay.

"So you liked Fontainbleau," she said, turning to me as, dinner being over, we went back to the drawing-room. "Well, I don't fancy I should like the place. According to Mr. Duke, it is full of rats—and I hate white mice."

"I never saw any white mice in Fontainebleau," I replied, feeling rather aggrieved.

"Well, but there are rats in Fontainebleau," argued Miss Russell, "I know it, and mice are young rats, you know."

She made this astounding statement in a tone that defied contradiction. I looked at Elizabeth; she was quite grave and unmoved. I looked at Miss Dunn; she gently bowed her pale face over her cup of tea, as if in assent. I was confounded. Were mice, white ones too, only young

rats, after all! There were many mysteries in Nature with which my limited knowledge had not made me familiar. Was this one? If so, when and where did mice end, and rats begin?

"It is just like mad dogs!" resumed Miss Russell, following out a concatenation of ideas that wholly escaped me. "Do you believe in mad dogs? I never knew one in all my life. I don't believe there is any such thing out of the newspapers. All made up. Why should a dog go mad? Just tell me that? I love dogs. I know they bite now and then, but I don't believe in their insanity—that won't go down with me. Besides, to lose one's reason is the badge of the human being."

And having thus slipped from rats to dogs, from hydrophobia to insanity, and from insanity into the loss of reason, Miss Russell dismissed the matter as settled.

And yet it seemed to me, even then, that this independent and original lady was strangely under the guidance of Miss Dunn, that embodiment of dull commonplace.

"Do you not like this Burgundy?" Miss Dunn had said to me at table. "Oh! I beg your pardon, I see it is claret you have."

"Now what does he mean?" had cried Miss Russell, without giving me time to answer, "he knows I cannot dine without Burgundy on the table!"

And the sinning "he" had to produce the missing wine; and as he did so gave a scowl to Miss Dunn, who smiled placidly over her glass. Miss Dunn, I fancied, liked Burgundy, and perhaps did not care for claret! And so it was about tea. When Miss Dunn thought it was time for that pleasant beverage, she pitied us for not having had a cup in the railway carriage as we came along, "So refreshing," said Miss Dunn.

"And why do we not have tea all this time?" asked Miss Russell, in sudden surprise and indignation. "What does she mean? She knows I like tea early."

Tea came, and she, though invisible, got a vicarious scolding, which made me conjecture

that Miss Dunn could not be the beloved of the household. Having thus secured her favourite wine, and got her tea at the right time, Miss Dunn now thought that she would like the repose of her bed-room. So, looking at me with the tenderest compassion, she observed, in her sweet tones:

"How pale you look, Miss Carr! I fear the fatigue of this journey has been too much for you."

Miss Russell looked at me; then her eyes sought the large looking-glass opposite her. I could see her scanning her own image there with a sort of uneasiness.

"We all look pale," she said, a little nervously, "and shall be the better for going to bed."

"I think so too," candidly replied Elizabeth, who looked *ennuyée*, and required no pressing to retire.

Though I received no invitation to do so, I unceremoniously followed her to her room. It was very like mine, only crimson—in honour, I suppose, of her being a matron.

- "Oh! Elizabeth," I exclaimed, point-blank, "you actually know Miss Russell!"
- "Yes," she negligently answered. "I knew her years ago."
- "And I, who thought we were coming to a strange house!" I said, reproachfully.
 - "It is strange to you, Bessie."
- "I should not have felt it so if you had told me that you knew Miss Russell."
 - "Should you not, really?"
 - "Why did you not tell me, Elizabeth?"
- "I am sure I don't know. Where is the use of telling everything, Bessie?"

She leaned back in her dark crimson chair, and clasped her hands above her head, after a fashion which she had when her thoughts were wandering. I stood before her, feeling reproved and chilled. That was her rule. Where is the use of telling everything? She felt no need to open her heart to human creature. She was light and frivolous enough in some things; but, after all, she was strong, for she could keep her own counsel, and bear her own burdens. I guessed that she was tired of me, but curiosity,

stronger than pride, kept me standing there.

"And what did Miss Russell mean by telling me that she had no legs?" I asked. "I looked at her after dinner, and I really think she has legs."

Elizabeth laughed.

"Of course she has, though they are useless to her, poor thing! She wanted to startle you, that is all."

"And has she got a murderer in her family?"
I inquired.

"I never heard that before. I suspect it is a new dodge of the old lady's."

"How odd she must be!"

"Is she so odd, Bessie? To me she seems like most ladies of her time of life, very cross with the world!"

"I am sure she has had a story!" I persisted.

"Everyone has had a story," answered Elizabeth, a little moodily. "Hers is a common one. She was never pretty, and she was poor, but she could run about nimbly enough in her young days. There was a Mr. Gray, a sort of cousin of hers, whom she would have given her ears to

marry, but who married some one else. She went into hysterics on the morning of his wedding, I am told, but danced at a ball in the evening. Some years ago this fortune came in her waters, and she cast her net and fished it up. Lovers came to her then—Mr. Gray, who was a widower, among the rest. She played with them all for some months; then, just as she was going to make up her mind, she was stricken with paralysis."

"And the lovers all fled," I exclaimed, with sympathy.

"Oh, dear, no!" answered Elizabeth, with a short laugh. "There was not one who would not have married her all the same; but she had sense or mistrust enough to send them adrift. She made up for her infirmity by being the most restless creature alive. She is always en route; and as to her misanthropy, she is wretched unless she has a houseful of men especially—and she hates men!—around her. We shall have a rare gathering soon."

She spoke languidly and wearily.

"You are tired, Elizabeth," I remarked.

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"Yes, rather," she candidly answered. "Good night. She held out her hand kindly enough; and, thus dismissed, I left her.

CHAPTER III.

THE loss of her luggage was a greater trouble to Elizabeth than she had chosen to acknowledge. Long before I was dressed the next morning she was gone to the station, and had received the answer to the master's telegram-"Not found." Another telegram was sent, and a similar answer was returned. On the second day Elizabeth lost patience, and sent off Watkins to London to make inquiries. It had suddenly occurred to her that as we left the hotel we had met a large family coming into the hall where our trunks were, and that the luggage might thus have got mixed and changed. I did not know of the girl's departure till she was gone, and knowing how dependent Elizabeth was upon her maid for all that concerned the child, I asked how she meant to manage.

"I must manage," she answered, impatiently. Watkins was to return the next morning; but she did not. In her stead came a letter, stating that the luggage had gone off to Devonshire, with the people whom we had met at the hotel; that she was waiting for it to be sent back to London, and that as soon as she got it again she would return to Hanvil.

"There never was such a donkey!" cried Elizabeth, in her rage. "What does she mean me to do with Harry all this time? Why did she not come back, and let the luggage be sent after her?"

"Why did you send her after the luggage?" was on the tip of my tongue, but the words were not spoken. Elizabeth had her own ways, and did not like them to be censured. Miss Dunn's early attempts in that direction had all been victoriously routed; she had pitied, she had criticised, she had advised—all in vain. Elizabeth had beaten her on the whole line, and, by a few home-thrusts, carried the war into

the enemy's own camp in such style that Miss Dunn retreated precipitately, held up a flag of truce, and asked for an armistice. It was sternly granted, but on certain stringent terms, which Elizabeth's beaten foe was careful not to infringe. All this I had seen and noticed, and now changed the topic of our discourse.

"Elizabeth," I asked, "where is the gathering of people you promised me?"

"It is like the Egyptians in the picture of the crossing of the Red Sea," she replied, gravely. "The canvas was a blank, for the sea was open, you know; the Jews were invisible, for they had crossed it; and as to the Egyptians, why, the painter said they were coming; and so say I—the gathering is coming."

We stood on a low, flagged terrace, at the back of Miss Russell's house—or rather mansion, since it had two staircases, an ugly, square, commonplace brick building; below us spread the flower-garden, and beyond this the grounds; to the left lay the orchard, as white with blossom as if it had just received a fall of snow. I fired at the sight.

"Oh, Elizabeth!" I cried, with sudden ardour, do come and look at the cherry-trees!"

"Thank you, Bessie; I do not care for cherry-trees before the cherries are on them."

"Well, then, come and look at the house of the Grays—it is such a rare old place!"

"So you have told me; but, again, I do not care about houses when there is no one in them—besides, my head aches."

"You look so well, Elizabeth-do come!"

But the stone flags on which we stood were not more obdurate than Elizabeth. She resisted me then, as, since our arrival, she had resisted all my attempts to make her join me in my voyages of discovery, not even allowing Harry to come with me. "This was just the time for brain-fever," she said, "and one could not be too careful."

"Well, then, let us stay in the garden," I now rejoined.

"I have letters to write," she promptly returned.

The blood rushed up to my face at this rebuff. She laid her hand on my shoulder, and kissed my cheek with a smile. "Don't be sensitive, my little Bessie," she said very kindly—"it will never do in life."

I knew that well enough, so, without attempting to argue, I left her, and went my way, and, spite her advice, I wondered—a little crossly, I confess it-why Elizabeth was so obstinate in putting me by. I walked through the flowergarden revolving this question, with eyes bent on the earth, when Miss Russell's harsh voice uttered almost in my ear a "good morning" that made me recoil in sudden alarm. I cannot say that I liked Miss Russell, though I had already discovered that she liked me. afraid of her dark eyes and darker eyebrows; she knew it, and the knowledge half vexed, half amused her. She was now sitting in the sun in her yellow satin chair, with an open parasol in her hand, and looking like a Chinese lady on an old japanned fire-screen which Mrs. Dawson used to have in her front parlour.

"Good morning, Miss Russell," I answered, vainly trying to be free and easy. "I hope you are quite well this morning"—for Miss Russell had breakfasted in her room.

"No, not at all well. But how far away you

stand, Miss Carr!—do you keep alooi because I have had a murderer in my family?"

I could not help laughing as I drew near.

"I don't believe in your murderer," I remarked, with sudden audacity.

She raised her eyebrows.

- "Not believe in him!—why, there is nothing in the Newgate Calendar half so authentic. Besides, why should I make believe to have a murderer if I had not one?"
- "That you know best," I replied, still looking sceptical.
- "Well, my dear," she returned, confidentially, "I may as well make a clean breast of it to you. My murderer is a scarecrow, which I hold up and flourish to keep the sparrows away from my cherries." And considering, I suppose, that my weak brain was not equal to the comprehension of this figure of speech, she proceeded to explain her meaning. "We all have our cherries—even you, though you look such a dear little innocent, have yours—only our cherries vary considerably with our years. Yours and mine, for instance, are not at all alike.

Well, my dear Miss Carr, some keep scarecrows, and some do not, to keep off the cherries. Mine—and a good one it is—is that murderer—a real one, please. When I was young, it kept lovers away; and now that I am old, it saves me from unpleasant company. The weak-minded, the timorous are shy of me—let them—let them!"

Miss Russell spoke this in a tone that was slightly hysterical; for, after all, the old wound was not healed yet—such wounds never do heal thoroughly, but smart in secret, however bravely we may smile in the face of the world.

"Well," she resumed, in an altered tone, "you were going for a walk, Miss Carr—in what direction, may I ask?"

I did not like to utter the name of "Gray," for the owner of Gray's House was no other than her cold lover, so I dubiously replied that I was going to walk in the country.

- "Is scenery your hobby?" tartly asked Miss Russell.
- "I have no hobby," I answered, rather affronted.

"Don't say so; we all have a hobby," insisted Miss Russell, getting slightly excited by my opposition, "and young ladies dearly like a canter, I can tell you. When I was a young lady," she added, with some bitterness, "it was not a canter, but a wild gallop I took; and much good it did me—much good it did me!" cried Miss Russell, with something like passion in her harsh ringing voice.

Miss Dunn, who now came up to us with a shawl on her arm, and a newspaper in her hand, diverted Miss Russell's melting mood.

"I thought it was too cool for you," said Miss Dunn sweetly, "and so I brought a shawl as well as the newspaper."

"Well, it is cool," replied Miss Russell suddenly discovering the fact. "Do you know, Miss Dunn, I think I shall go in. Will you kindly call Brown?"

"I shall wheel you in myself," said Miss Dunn, still sweetly; "your chair gives no trouble."

And having thus accomplished the object she had in bringing out the shawl, Miss Dunn put her hand to the yellow satin chair, and wheeled in the lady who would not trust herself to a husband, but who submitted so completely to her yoke.

I crossed the flower-garden, and made my way straight to a high hedge which limited Miss Russell's desmesnes towards the south. There was a gap in that hedge, through which I crept, not without some damage to my hair and garments; but to my great delight. With a new tear in my dress, but with a happy sense of independence and liberty, I found myself on the other side, and in the open country.

I crossed a field, I climbed over a stile, then I trod down—may my footsteps have been light!—the young corn in another field, and so reached a hollow lane, which I already dearly liked. A keen breeze swept over the two meadows between which this path crept up; but it felt warm, pleasant, and sheltered when I was below. Reckless of future aches and pains, I threw myself down on the grassy bank, and half lay, half sat there, feeling that idle happiness which is one of the temptations wherewith Dame Nature is ever besetting her unwary visi-

tors. When Adam was sent forth to till the earth, and eat bread earned with the sweat of his brow, he must have found it hard to realize the doom that had been laid upon him; for though cursed through sin, the earth was fair to look upon. The green trees did not speak of Winter; the birds sang as if death were not; and the ground teemed with weeds so lovely and so gay that it must have seemed as if man need never toil.

I cannot say that I thought of Adam as I lay in the sun; for Adam is that sort of remote ancestor whom youth rarely remembers; but never had labour seemed to me so useless a thing as it did then. Work!—why work? The lovely bank before me had not laboured, and look at it! All the art of man, all the wealth of Cræsus, could not bring forth a thing that should vie with the green wreath on its tawny brow. First, and decidedly foremost, was a tall sloe-tree, a gay prodigal, all white blossoms, and without a leaf a syet to its back. A little bird was perched on one of its brown twigs, and, without seeming to care for me,

stood there trimming itself in the sun. At the foot of the sloe-tree, scattered there in an abundance of which my town-life had given me no conception, grew bunches of primroses, beautiful, delicate, and yellow. I had attempted to count them, and had given it up; shells on a sandy seashore are not more innumerable; and, far as the eye could reach, they spread on as if the world were all their own. And they were not alone. The celandine was there, starry and golden; and violets, scentless, but very fair to look upon, peeped out from the young grass; and there were patches of daisies, looking for all the world like charity-school girls in white caps, talking and chatting together; and the bramble trailed its purple leaves midst the tender Spring green of all the young growth beneath: and the furze showed here and there a blossom of the purest gold; and, truly, looking at all this beauty, one might say of it that it was good.

It was delightful to lie thus; but motion, too, is pleasant—besides, I had the house of the Grays to look at, and a big white calf, who

stood staring down at me from the brink of the opposite meadow, made me feel somewhat uneasy. Was he fastened? And if he was not, suppose he should want to come down to me? Retreat, if not dignified, was prudent, so I rose, and, crossing more corn-fields, I entered a sunny road, which had been a dark path once on a Trees that had shed their leaves for a century and more, had flung their heavy boughs across it, and given it shade and coolness. the purse of the Grays had grown light just as their timber became most valuable, and the stately old elms had fallen beneath the axe. And yet the path was lovely still, with here and there a mossy rock, and here and there the gnarled root of an old tree that had defied the woodman's axe, and still wore a wintry cloak of ivy thrown over its old brown limbs. It ended in two rows of young trees, tall and slender, that swayed to the breeze, and vainly tried to seem stately. The blue sky looked in everywhere through their thin branches, and betrayed them. Beyond them lay the green park, which enclosed the deserted home of the Grays. A road traversed it. This I followed till I reached a little stone bridge which spanned a shining stream, and here I paused and looked. The little river flowed under an arch of tall trees, and far away to the right I could see the dark wheel of an old water-mill. To the left, at the end of a noble avenue, which the pride of the Grays had not allowed them to touch, rose Gray's House, a stone mansion, standing quiet and stately in its green solitude. It was all shut up, and looked desolate, but neither ruin nor decay had touched, as yet, the abode of the old family. They did not like it. When they came to it their visits were abrupt and unexpected, and when they left their departure resembled a flight. Everyone knew why, though they were shy of confessing their true reason. For the last hundred years the Grays had all died there. However they might manage, they seemed unable to avoid that fate. They might live abroad, they might not come for years, they might arrive at night, and depart in the morning, it availed them not-they died nowhere else. Sudden diseases, accidents, fatalities that spared others, were sure to reach them. They knew it—everyone knew it—but they did not like it, and so they shunned the place where the destroyer bided his hour so surely.

I stood looking at the quaint old house, so calm and pleasant of aspect in the April sun; and when, tired of my contemplation, I at length turned away, I took, purposely, a path that led me to another possession of the Gray's. were a peculiar family, and had their own ways about being buried, as well as about dying. had pleased them, in the days gone by, to eschew churchyards and churches for their dead, and to be laid apart in a place of their own. This was merely a little patch of land, divided by a low hedge from the fields around it. Slabs of stone, some black and sunken, others still white and new, were scattered over it. was but one tree in it, and that had come there by chance, an old apple-tree, which was not yet in blossom, and coyly spread its green boughs, tipped with rosy buds, to the pleasant Spring breezes.

This last resting-place of the Grays was a

very tranquil spot. Few people ever came here, and children never crept in through the hedge to gather the daises and primroses that grew midst the graves. It lay alone, surrounded by green fields, that were all yellow with corn in Summer; and Death, the husbandman, reaped his harvest here, and laid fresh seed in the dark bosom of the earth, to ripen in a better season, and yield its fruit on the heavenly shores. Whilst I peeped in at the graves over the hedge a lark sung in the air above, very sweetly, and very far away; and as I was young, and did not care in the least for death, all this was beautiful and pleasant. And so time passed, until it occurred to me that I had been out long enough. Spite the tear in my dress, I wished to get in back again to Hanvil House through the gap in the hedge. My road homewards thus brought me back to the lane I had already been in that morning. This time it was not lonely. Two little boys in grey knickerbockers were drawing a wheelbarrow, in which their elder sister, I suppose, a little girl of eight or nine, sat gravely. She wore a little rakish straw hat, with blue

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ribands, and lolled back in her wheelbarrow with the air of a fashionable woman who takes her drive in the park.

"Don't jolt," she said, as I went by. The two greys, who already looked warm, and were very red in the face—the lane was full of ruts—seemed to feel as if this were too much.

"I'll tell you what, Ellinor," protested the younger one, suddenly standing still—here he unluckily perceived me, as stealthily drawing out a scrap of paper from my pocket, and feeling for a pencil, I was going to put the three, Ellinor and the greys, all down on paper. They stared at me. My opportunity was gone. I walked on, and looked mechanically at the paper which I still held. It was scribbled in a rapid, careless hand, with words and signs which I could not at first decipher. I stood still in some perplexity. At length I read:

"May Queen, 3 P.M., Ostende. April 29th, Hibernia—Kingstown, May 1st; up-trains, 4, 7, 10." The rest was illegible. Here was a puzzle for me. How had this paper, which I had certainly never written, come into my pos-

session? What had I to do with steamers and railway-trains? All at once the truth came home to me with the suddenness of lightning. This must be the paper which Harry had abstracted from the Bradshaw at the hotel, and which I had taken from him and put into my pocket. It had lain there forgotten, till it now came out to tell me a story which filled me with such sorrow that in the first sharpness of the pang I cried out aloud, "Oh, Elizabeth!" I forgot the children. I sat down on the bank, and wrung my hands in passionate distress; and when I remembered them, and looked round, they were gone. They had crept away through a bush, behind which I heard their voices farther and farther away. I was alone-alone with the sunshine and my desolation.

CHAPTER IV.

ELIZABETH meant to leave me. That opportunity for flight and liberty which Mr. de Lusignan had so imprudently given her, she meant to seize. I knew now why her luggage had been lost, why Watkins was gone, why Harry was never confided to me, why his mother never lost sight of him. And I remembered, too, with tardy clear-sightedness, Miss Dunn's looks when Mrs. Henry de Lusignan's missing trunks were mentioned. She had seen through this-of course she had-but then she was afraid of Elizabeth; besides, she did not care, in reality, whether she stayed or went But, though partly alienated and away. estranged, Elizabeth had been the friend of my heart, and a friendship that has been leaves

something behind it as penetrating and as sweet as the scent of faded roses. The flower may be withered, we may feel and know that it shall bloom never again, its dead scent is not even that which it had in the days of its loveliness, but the fragrance is still dear.

But I was already learning to endure inevitable things. That inexorable Fate to which the gods themselves had to submit must have taught the men and women of old a dreary sort of resignation. What availed revolt, when an iron hand was laid upon the patient's neck? To bear, even more than to act, was surely the great lesson, then.

If Elizabeth was bent upon going, I could not keep her. If she had decreed, with that strong will of hers, that we should never again meet in life, I could not alter her resolve. I had but to submit, then—forget the paper I had read, look on as if I saw nothing, and let her go for ever away from me, as, standing upon the shore of a running stream, I might see the boat with which mine had once sailed drifting down its current, and make no effort to stop its course.

"I must bear it," I said to myself; and I rose and went home, but not by the gap in the hedge, after all—I was too much sobered for that. I went back by a dull road, which took me straight to the grounds that lay round Hanvil House. I entered the orchard, to stay there awhile and think; but scarcely had I pushed open the wicket-gate when I met Miss Dunn, who was coming out.

"Is Mrs. Henry de Lusignan already come back?" she asked, in sweet surprise.

My heart gave a great throb—was she already gone?

"I have been out alone," I answered.

"I am so stupid," said Miss Dunn, opening her blue eyes at herself; "but I really thought you were gone to Hanvil with Mrs. Henry de Lusignan,"—she never once missed uttering her name in full—"and the child."

I did not answer. I was wondering whether Elizabeth was going to Ostende on the May Queen, or to Kingstown on the Hibernia. Belgium was the safer refuge—but then would Mr. de Lusignan ever look for her in Ireland?

"Has she long been gone?" I asked, making an effort to speak.

"Oh! about an hour, I daresay. You know we have some gentlemen to dinner—neighbours of Miss Russell's. Mrs. Henry de Lusignan declared she must either dine in her room or get something to wear; and she is gone to Hanvil for that purpose, I think. She took the carriage, and will not be long away, I daresay."

Gentlemen to dinner; and should I have to encounter them alone, with that secret weighing me down? I pictured all the horrors of such an evening. The delayed dinner, Miss Russell's vexation and ill-temper, Miss Dunn's provoking coolness, and then the gentlemen! With the intuition of despair, I felt that they would all be on my back. Miss Dunn would decline all share of that burden as a matter of course, if it were only to make me wretched. And country gentlemen, I had always heard, were dreadfully heavy and oppressive. They took in so much fresh air, and ate so much solid meat, and drauk so much claret, and rode so hard, and prosed so wearily-all classical truths,

which I had imbibed with the trusting faith that failed him of Didymus—that they were absolutely intolerable. Of course Miss Russell's back was the one which circumstances had appointed to bear that burden; but Miss Russell professed to hate men, and had evidently relied upon Elizabeth and me to entertain these; and I imagined her quite capable of retiring to her bedroom, and troubling herself no more with her "gentlemen" than if they were mine. I wonder these thoughts came to me, but they did, spite other thoughts that were sad and perplexed enough.

"I am afraid I must leave you," said Miss Dunn, looking at her watch; "it is actually two o'clock! I think we shall have plenty of cherries this year. Miss Russell is so fond of cherries—are you, Miss Carr?"

I replied, despondently, that I was extremely fond of cherries; and I remained alone with the lovely white blossoms, which sun and air and gentle rains and sweet dews were to convert into the fruit that Miss Russell loved. I stayed there an hour and more; then feeling too miser-

able to face Miss Russell, or indeed anyone, I went up to my room and remained there till it was time to dress.

I was very miserable, but I did my best Human Nature will have it to look well. so. Mary Stuart adorned herself for the scaffold. She was going to die, but I am sure she knew black velvet became what was left of the royal loveliness which had sent the world mad, and has ruled the hearts of men ever since the Syren was laid in her grave. For who will venture to say that, if this Royal Mary had been shrewish or homely of aspect, the world would have cared so much or so long about her! So I did my best. I was Iphigenia, a victim laid on the sacrificial altar of social duty, but to adorn myself, and make my little person pleasant to look upon, was a part of that duty, a sort of moral law, and I accomplished it to my best and utmost.

My utmost was a grey silk dress, a tucker of dainty lace, and a scarlet breast-knot. Beyond this my wardrobe would not go, but it was enough. Only how was I to go down? Oh!

if Elizabeth had only been there! I could have slipped into the drawing-room so nicely behind her! No one would have minded me in her presence. I could have glided into a chair as unnoticed as if I had had the ring on my finger, or on my shoulders the rare mantle, both of which made their owner invisible to common eyes.

Miss Russell dined early, and, what was more, she had already informed me that rigid punctuality was part of her code of morals. I had heard carriage-wheels below-I could not delay any longer. I gave myself a last anxious look, and went down. I listened at the drawing-room door. Miss Russell's harsh voice was talking loud; before she had done, I opened the door as softly as I could. I saw the backs of two gentlemen and a lady, who did not appear to have heard me; and, sitting back in an armchair in the full brilliancy of her delicate beauty, Elizabeth, who was fanning herself slowly. I do not know which amazed me most, her unexpected presence, or the dress she wore. It was black as ever, but I recognized it at once. At a look I knew that deep and costly lace garniture, more tasteful even than costly; but where did it come from? Was Elizabeth like the princess in the fairy-tales, whose three dresses—one like the sun, one like the moon, and one like the stars—travelled underground with her wherever she went, and helped her to get back her lost lover's heart. She was fanning herself, as I said; but she was also listening to a gentleman, who turned round slowly, as Miss Russell said in a sharp tone:

- "And what do you think, Mr. Gray?"
- "I beg your pardon, I—I did not hear," answered Mr. Gray.

He spoke in a low, hesitating tone, like one who is not sure that he says the right thing; and he turned towards me as he spoke, the pale, handsome profile of a man of fifty or so; a man essentially elegant, slender, and aristocratic-looking, on whom nature had set the stamp which she does not always grant to blue blood.

"I was saying," tartly replied Miss Russell, whose dark brows nearly met; but here she saw me, and in a moment I felt drawn to her yellow chair, and was there introduced, without

mercy, to Mr. Gray—Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Gray, and a young gentleman, whose name, I think, was Duke, but I am not sure. I survived the operation, during which a saucy, mocking smile flitted upon the lips of Elizabeth; and, retreating to a chair by a remote table, I there buried myself in a book of sketches; but no one minded me, and I soon looked up.

Mrs. Thomas Gray, a very broad and double-chinned matron, was holding forth emphatically to the young gentleman, of whose appearance I only remember that he had stiff hair, and that he looked weak-minded. Her husband, Mr. Thomas Gray, the country gentleman, par excellence, was listening to Miss Russell, who talked with great animation and gaiety, but whose sallow features seemed to me contracted with care or pain as she watched her early lover's contemplation of Elizabeth.

I do not think Mr. Gray—the owner of Gray's House—made many efforts to entertain or charm my beautiful friend. He looked far too languid to do anything of the kind; but as there is no fatigue in using one's eyes when the print is

large and fair, so he sat and gazed at Elizabeth's beauty with the dilettante, critical sort of look with which, when he travelled, he may have sat and gazed at a Raphael or a Giorgione.

I was watching him with involuntary interest, when Miss Dunn, who had not been in the room all this time, now entered it noiselessly, and came and sat by me.

"How very lovely Mrs. Henry de Lusignan looks this evening," she said, softly.

"Oh! very," I replied; "there is something so brilliant and delicate about her beauty."

But my speech fell unheeded on Miss Dunn's ear. She had started, and seemed to be listening.

"I thought the other guest was coming," she remarked slowly; then, with a vivacity and eagerness very rare in her, she turned upon me. "Who is it? You know, of course."

"Oh! dear no," I answered, rather disturbed; "is there another?" For I thought the gathering before me sufficiently formidable, without any addition to it,

"Yes; and dinner has been put an hour later

for that guest. Come, confess you know who it is, Miss Carr."

Her sleepy blue eyes had suddenly grown as sharp and keen as needles; but ignorance must have been very legibly expressed in mine, for blank disappointment followed this inquiring look. Miss Dunn, being thoroughly convinced of my ignorance, became as suddenly dull as she had become lively, and made no other effort to entertain me, but sat there by me without saying a word, only every now and then darting furtive looks towards the door. I confess I took very little interest in this new-comer -why should I?-what were Miss Russell's guests to me? My mind was in a whirl with Elizabeth, who looked so cold and handsome, and who was plotting flight all the time. What should I do when she was gone, and I remained alone in this strange house? And then, when would she go?-very soon, I felt sure. Here the sound of the opening door, the voice of the servant uttering a name, and a low, startled "Ah!" from the chair next me, all blended together. I turned round hastily, and

saw Miss Dunn staring with open mouth and eyes at Eugène Herbert, who stood at the door with the full light of the chandelier falling on his handsome face.

He came in as easy and unembarrassed as ever, went up to Miss Russell, who received him graciously, and seemed at home with everyone present. I was amazed and rather bewildered to meet him thus in the house of his enemy. I noticed a change—a very slight, transient change—passing across the lovely face of Elizabeth; also I saw that Miss Dunn's lips tightened, and that her cheeks grew slightly flushed, but everyone else seemed unconcerned, and that was all, till Mr. Herbert saw me and bowed courteously.

Dinner was ready; Miss Russell was wheeled in, and my happy stars confided me to the care of the young gentleman who looked weakminded. [I have always felt convinced that he thought me weak-minded, but never mind.] He was very good-natured, and did his best to enlighten and entertain me all dinner-time. I was so full of other thoughts that, I am ashamed to say it, only a few traits of his remarkable and powerful conversation have survived the wear and tear to which memory is subject on her road from youth to middle age. Besides, my neighbour was a perfect Tacitus in his way; brevity of style was his idol. He cultivated it especially through the means of ellipsis; and with the caprice and fancy of genius, he sometimes omitted one part of speech, sometimes another. He did not utter one word till he had taken his soup, after which he graciously turned to me, and said—

"Been Fontainebleau, am told."

I answered that I had spent some months there.

"Liked it?" he suggested.

Was this a statement, or a question? I faucied that it was a question, and replied that I liked Fontainebleau very much.

"Nice place. Know Joseph?"

I was going to ask who was Joseph, but forbore, seeing that my companion was in the agonies of swallowing a fish-bone. This took some time, during which I kindly looked another way. When the operation was over, he resumed—

- "Famous dog Joseph had."
- "Had he?" was all I could find to say. If I had been older, and more conventional, I should probably have remarked, "How very interesting!" or at least have uttered a girlish "Dear me!"
- "Loads of rats Fontainebleau, you know," pursued my informant.

I became lively and attentive. I now saw from whom Miss Russell had received her impression that Fontainebleau was infested with rats. Had she also got from my neighbour the mysterious fact that mice are young rats? I looked at his smooth face and stiff hair, and on reflection did not think he had anything to do with that fancy. He was, as he would have said himself, "in another line."

"Shambles full," he continued—"rare fun Joseph's dog. Ever saw anything the kind?"

I replied that I had not; upon which he became suddenly lively, and carried away by VOL. III.

narrative style, he forgot himself so far as to use a few prepositions.

"Well, you see, the shambles are full of rats, and the rats have a cap'n, and the cap'n drills them, as it were, and the rats will fight it out. A great deal of pluck rats have; some would worry Joseph's dog, and fly at his throat. He used to shake 'em off so;" he shook himself with great gusto; "but he kept it in mind, and when he had done with the quiet ones, those that only ran in corners, and didn't fly at him, he teased the others before he killed 'em, to punish 'em, you see. Never punished the quiet ones, only killed 'em. A deal of sense Joseph's dog had."

This interesting and edifying conversation had not flowed on smoothly. It had undergone all the usual dinner interruptions, and had carried us to the middle of the meal. My companion was too generous and too zealous to give me up when that theme was over; but unluckily my treacherous memory has preserved only a few fragments of the discourse with which he charmed my ear. When I try to re-

member what it was about, I only get back such words as "Jumping Ben, we used to call him," and "was dreadfully knocked to pieces, you know"-fragments so suggestive and tantalizing to me that I can only compare myself to the savant who unfolds the scorched remains of a Pompeian gentleman's library, and deciphering such words as "Rome, Annibal, the dying hero," and the like (in Latin, of course), asks himself in despair whether the lost books of some Roman historian lie there mutilated and useless before him. But I must be candid. I was young and heedless then, and knew as much of the treasures I was casting away as Newton's little dog Diamond knew the value of the manuscripts he so wantonly destroyed. Besides—why deny it?—Elizabeth sat opposite me, between Mr. Gray and Mr. Herbert. Mr. Gray was very handsome, languid, and quiet; I did not mind him, but I thought a good deal of the other two. They were very pleasant and very smiling—as pleasant as if they had never met before. There was not a cold look in her eyes—not a reproachful frown on his

broad, clear forehead. As for passion, as for jealousy, as for love, it was as if these ghosts of the past were laid for ever at rest, and could never haunt these two again. I saw their faces sometimes of one side, sometimes of the other, of the flowers and ferns of the epergne. I do not think they saw me.

Once or twice I heard the speech that passed between them. It was then, I daresay, that my neighbour talked of "Jumping Ben." It was very insignificant, and I vainly tortured my brains to give it a meaning.

- "How did you like it?" she asked.
- "Not much," he answered. "I preferred——"

Here "Jumping Ben" again came in, and I neither knew what Mr. Herbert did not like much, nor what he preferred.

- "Do you like change?" resumed Elizabeth.
- "Not for its own sake, but I like it when it has a pleasant face."

Here Elizabeth caught my eye, and nodded to me a little mockingly. Mr. Herbert saw it, and gave her a peculiar look, attentive and shrewd—such a look as one saw rarely with him, but which let in a light both sudden and unexpected upon his real nature, and changed one's impressions of it as completely as the cloud changes the aspect of the sunny land-scape. I strained my ears and my eyes to hear and see more than this, but, thanks to my intellectual neighbour, it was impossible. All I saw was that, if Mr. Gray was silent, and left Elizabeth pretty much to her neighbour, he was as attentive as ever in his contemplation of her beauty.

Miss Russell, who had been very lively all dinner-time, made up for her vivacity by a nap when we were in the drawing-room. She took her ease, like the man in his own inn, without scruple. Miss Dunn entertained us after her fashion of fluent commonplace, flowing on as imperturbably and as sluggishly as the waters of a canal. Elizabeth sat and looked, as she felt, perfectly indifferent, and Mrs. Thomas Gray, leaning back in her chair, took possession, to my alarm, of my luckless individual.

Mrs. Thomas Gray's voice was naturally deep and sonorous; this had suggested to her perhaps the propriety of a solemn, not to say pompous style of conversation—just as fair women like blue, and brunettes have a weakness for bright colours. At the same time, Mrs. Thomas Gray kindly tempered this rather oppressive tone by a grave jocosity, which was probably meant to place her hearer at his or her ease. I say her hearer, because she made it a point never to address more than one person at a time. I was now thus favoured.

"You have been in Switzerland, Miss——"Here she paused.

"Carr," I suggested.

"Then do tell me you did not like it," she implored, in a tone of solemn joking; "I entreat you to tell me that you did not. I think Switzerland the greatest imposition next to Italy. That, however, beats everything hollow. Switzerland is literally a land of Goshen, Miss Carr, a land of honey and milk, for you can get nothing else to feed upon. I fasted like any Catholic, Miss Carr, whilst I was in the mountains of that blessed country, and I was in a state of perfect exhaustion when we came down to the

valleys again. Mr. Gray's first thought was of course to get some meat for me, and when I actually saw a beefsteak on the table, I nearly shed tears of emotion."

Here, to my great relief, Miss Russell woke up with a short and rather snappish "So they are still in there, are they?" which alluded, no doubt, to the gentlemen over their wine, and suggested the propriety of a solemn chuckle to Mrs. Thomas Gray, and also that she should devote herself to her hostess. I at once escaped to my remote table, and had scarcely reached it when the gentlemen came in. Miss Dunn immediately came and sat by me.

"How altered Mr. Herbert is!" she said in her sweet voice.

I raised my eyes to his handsome face—he was already by Elizabeth. I saw few tokens of change there, and I said so.

- "Mr. Herbert looks very well," I added.
- "Oh! I did not speak of his looks," and she laughed softly; "they are always right, with his classical face. Does it not strike you, Miss Carr, who are an artist, that there is a kind of face

one could draw without seeing it almost. So much for the forehead, so much for the nose—a straight one of course—so much for the upper lip, and so much for the chin."

This was very ill-natured, but, blind as a beetle, I fell into the trap, and, reddening up as I spoke, I answered rather hastily:

"Mr. Herbert's nose is not straight; it is slightly curved."

"Is it?" replied Miss Dunn, raising her pale eyebrows as if she knew nothing about it; "but I assure you, Miss Carr, I meant no allusion to Mr. Herbert's face, or rather nose; indeed, I beg your pardon for having introduced his name, I ought to have remembered what a dear friend of yours he used to be, only I am sure you are too good-natured not to excuse me."

I replied, "Oh! don't mention it," and felt ready to cry with rage.

This was Miss Dunn's revenge for the trick Miss Russell had played upon her in bringing Mr. Herbert to Hanvil House without her knowledge. Satisfied with having exasperated me, she soon found a motive for leaving me to my own thoughts. I was sadly vexed with myself, with everything, and with everyone about me. I took up a book of sketches from the table and looked at, but did not see, the bay of Naples and the island of Capri. Why had I been so foolish? Should I never know better? Why especially was I in this house to be victimized by Miss Dunn? I had not wanted to meet Mr. Herbert again. He had cost me very dear, he had given me up, and he cared so little about me that he did not use me with common civility! Besides—"

Here, as if to answer this fault-finding monologue, Mr. Herbert suddenly came to me, and looking at me with quiet friendliness, as if we parted yesterday, sat down, uninvited by anything in my looks and manner, in the chair which Miss Dunn had vacated.

"I am told that you have not been well since we last met, Miss Carr," he remarked, but his tone was rather that of polite regret than the tone of old affection.

"I have been ill, but that is long ago; I am well again now, thank you."

"You look remarkably well."

I did not answer.

- "I little thought I should see you this evening," he resumed, "but I believe Miss Russell likes to take her friends by surprise. She used me as a sort of Medusa's head for one person here."
- "Did you not know whom you were going to see?"
 - "Ladies, I was told."

Another pause.

- "How is Neptune?" I asked.
- "Neptune is dead," answered Mr. Herbert.
- "Oh! I am so sorry!" I said, quickly. "What a trouble it must have been to you, Mr. Herbert!"
- "He was only a dog, Miss Carr. He would have given his dog's life over and over again before living creature should have harmed me. What of that? His very fidelity proved that he was a brute. Must I not prove my superiority over him by a calm, grand sort of ingratitude? The attribute of the human being, you know!"

I looked at him in a sort of perplexity. Mr. Herbert used not to speak so formerly. I was at a loss what to say next, so, after awhile, I came out with:

"How do you like this part of the country?"

He seemed surprised at the question, but answered reapidly:

- "Very much. It is both pastoral and wild."
- "Have you seen Gray's House?" I continued. "I believe Mr. Gray is not in it yet, for it was shut up to-day, and I know he objects to it. Try to see it whilst it is shut up. It would make a subject for a picture for you, Mr. Herbert. It is so beautiful and lonely."

Mr. Herbert laughed.

- "I am afraid I am never likely to see Gray's House in that enviable state," he replied.
- "But it would be so easy," I persisted. "Even if he goes to it to-morrow, he is sure not to stay long, and if you come whilst he is away you will see Gray's House in all its beauty."

Mr. Herbert looked at me.

"I see you do not know," he said, after a pause. "Gray's House is mine."

I thought I was dreaming. Mr. Herbert saw my amazement, and the shrewd look came to his eyes.

"What!" he said, quietly, "do you see no difference in me, Miss Carr? Is the purchaser of Gray's House the same man who painted unsaleable pictures in Fontainebleau? Impossible! Your penetration deceives you. There must be a difference in me. I assure you I feel a great one. I have acquired a hundred faculties that I wanted when you knew me first. I have read Molière since we parted, and I have learned from him that the rich man is like his Marquis, 'Qui sait tout sans avoir rien appris!"

"Then you are rich?" I exclaimed, with most uncivilized amazement.

"After a fashion, I am, since I have been able to purchase a house and estate, on which I mean to reside, and that is why I cannot hope to see Gray's House in all its beauty."

I do not know what prompted my next question. "Have you got other houses and estates?" I asked, very seriously.

"No; I am not like the master of Puss in

Boots. My landed property is not unlimited. But I have three per cents. Do you know what three per cents. are, Miss Carr?"

I confessed my ignorance.

- "Well, I have some of them, and shares-"
- "I know all about shares," I interrupted.
- "Do you? Well, I have loads of shares in all sort of things—railways, mines, companies, &c."
- "How fortunate you have been," I remarked, not knowing what to say.
- "No, no, not fortunate," he corrected. "Clever, Miss Carr—shrewd, far-seeing, long-headed. For, to tell you the truth, this money of mine all comes from one source, the muchabused Spanish Galiot Company."
- "But I thought it was such a dreadful——"
 Here I hesitated.
- "Swindle!" he suggested. "Yes, the world said so; but the world did what the monument in the City—as Pope says—does daily. And now," he added, very sadly, "now that the poor fellow who gave me this fortune is in his grave, the world does not so much praise him as it admires me for my clear-sightedness."

"But you were clear-sighted," I argued.

"Not I. I liked him, and I had faith in him; but I beg your pardon. Your remark about Gray's House has made me say all this. Do you draw still?"

I shook my head and sighed. He did not understand that with him all my taste for drawing had passed away.

"Of course you paint?" I said.

A sudden cloud came over his face.

"Oh! no," he answered, rather coldly. "As a poor man, I could have fought my way up, though I began so late. As a man of some property, I should ever be an amateur, and not a soul would care for my pictures. When I was a painter, the world would not grant me common sense; now that I am well off, the world will not grant me any gift save that of making more money. Eugène Herbert on the list of directors to a new company would be the very thing, Miss Carr; but Eugène Herbert with an A.R. or an R.A. to it in a catalogue would never do."

This, then, was the thorn of his new lot,

since every son of Adam must needs pay the cost of good-fortune.

What more he might have said on this matter, if he would really have said more, was put . an end to by Miss Russell. She could never bear to be long out of any discourse, and she now claimed Mr. Herbert's attention, after her imperious fashion; and, not unwillingly, it seemed to me, he turned round from me and my questions to her. He was altered, after all -I felt it, I saw it, during the whole of that evening; for after this he dropped me as completely as if we had been total strangers. Oh! what a dull, wearisome evening it was; and how tired and heartsick I felt when it was over, and the guests were gone! Miss Russell looked gaunt and more than usually yellow with fatigue—she had talked incessantly; Miss Dunn yawned and shut her sleepy eyes; and, though the roses on the cheeks of Elizabeth were as brilliant as ever, she said she was tired to death. We went up together; at the door of my room Elizabeth wanted to leave me, but I followed her into hers.

- "Oh! Elizabeth," I exclaimed, as I closed the door, "were you not amazed to see Mr. Herbert?"
- "Ye—es," replied Elizabeth, yawning; and she sank down on a chair with a look of fatigue.

But I would not be deterred, and standing before her, I pursued:

"It seems he is quite rich now."

Elizabeth did not answer.

- "Don't you find him altered?" I asked.
- "How so?"
- "I can scarcely say; but there is a great change in him—he seems so much older and—harder!"

I could not help sighing as I said this; but Elizabeth smiled and replied, "So much the better for him, Bessie." And I could read in her look and smile that Mr. Herbert had rather gained than lost in her good opinion. My heart leaped with a secret hope.

"Oh! Elizabeth," I exclaimed eagerly—then paused.

"Oh! Bessie, good night," she said gaily. "I am so tired—I think I shall sleep well."

I do not know how Elizabeth slept. It was late when I fell asleep, and late when I woke. The sun was shining in my room, and a slip of paper lay on my pillow.

"God bless you!" Elizabeth had written upon it. She was gone, after all. I had feared that she would go, but it was none the less hard—she was gone, and I cried bitterly.

CHAPTER V.

MISS DUNN alone presided at the breakfast-table when I went down.

"Poor dear Miss Russell is so poorly!" she said plaintively.

I expressed my regret, and looked furtively at Elizabeth's vacant chair. Did not Miss Dunn know that she was gone? Miss Dunn caught my look, and answered it.

"Poor dear Mrs. Henry de Lusignan!" she remarked, helping me to a cup of tea—"so provoking! But servants are so tiresome. I told her so when the telegram came. They do it on purpose to fall ill at the wrong time. So tiresome to take a journey with a child, and all because Watson or Watkins chooses to be dangerously ill."

I heard Miss Dunn in silence. It was some comfort that I had to receive, not to give, or at least abet, a false explanation of Elizabeth's flight. Miss Dunn did not seem to have the least suspicion that it was a flight, but speculated, with every appearance of simple faith, on the day of Elizabeth's return. Did I not think that Mrs. Henry de Lusignan would return on Monday? No. Then I thought she would come back on Tuesday next. Why so? She, Miss Dunn, thought that Monday would be the day; only she should like to know why I fancied it would be Tuesday? I protested, in some despair, that I had no preference for Tuesday; upon which Miss Dunn immediately discovered that I had fixed upon Wednesday. And so she worried me till breakfast was nearly over, when all at once, and I scarcely knew how, Mr. Herbert's name came in.

"It was such a delightful surprise to me!" remarked Miss Dunn; "especially to find him so well off. I daresay you know, Miss Carr, that I was very intimate with Mr. Herbert and his mother formerly. It was quite a blow to

me when dear Miss Russell got Hanvil. I always tell her so. I was, naturally, for my friends the Herberts at that time; but dear Eugène is so clever! he soon got another fortune; and when dear Miss Russell, who is the most generous creature alive, learned that he had bought Gray's House, she hastened to extend the hand of reconciliation. It would have been so awkward to have been enemies and neighbours!"

"How would Miss Russell have managed if Mr. Herbert had come to Gray's House and yet been a poor man?" I asked.

"Ah! but that would have been so very different a sort of thing!" candidly replied Miss Dunn.

She left me to return to Miss Russell. I remained alone, wondering what I should do with myself in that strange house. It seemed preternaturally silent and lonely. The servants were quiet below, for Miss Russell was sleeping. A gloomy grey sky hung low over the garden, and heavy clouds, laden with rain, moved slowly along, followed by others as heavy as grey,

and as monotonous. Miss Dunn had the paper; Miss Russell never read, and had no booksbesides, what could books have done for me in my present mood, when it was Elizabeth, and all Elizabeth, and a sorrow that could not be spoken, and for which none could offer me comfort. I went up to my room, and as I passed by the door of that faithless friend, I could not resist the impulse which made me open it and look in. Every token of her presence had already vanished; no stray book or handkerchief or glove was left to tell me of Elizabeth. had been there a few days, and she was gone for ever, and the room was ready for another guest. Its blank aspect so plainly told me "forget her," that I shut the door again without attempting to cross the threshold. "Forget me!"-hard lesson, yet one which it seemed I must learn.

I dreaded Miss Russell and her shrewd black eyes; it was, therefore, some comfort, on the theory that it is an ill wind which blows nobody good, to learn that she had a desperately bad headache, which would confine her to her room the whole day. Miss Dunn, who gave me this information at luncheon, was also kind enough to abstain from once mentioning the name of Elizabeth. Indeed, she seemed bent—very kindly, no doubt—on seeking for other themes, and whilst sipping her Burgundy with an absent air, she remarked across the table to me:

"Were you not struck with Mr. Gray—so handsome, so elegant, so very—you know. I am afraid I do not express myself very well."

I replied weariedly that I understood her meaning quite well, and that Mr. Gray was all she said. Thus encouraged, Miss Dunn continued:

"He is at Hanvil, you know. He really would not trust himself to Gray's House. I believe it is the token of all superior minds to have such weaknesses. I trust," added Miss Dunn, looking pensively at her wine, "that the fate of the Grays will not extend to the Herberts."

I trusted that it would not, rather drily.

"Do you not think it a pity Mr. Gray should have parted with Gray's House? It seems it

was Mr. Thomas Gray who, by proposing to cut off the entail, brought it all about."

I made an effort to say "Indeed."

"Yes, you understand entail, of course. Miss Carr, I have noticed how very clever at all business matters you are. Entail is very mysterious to me, and I wish you would explain—"

"Oh! dear no," I interrupted, much alarmed.
"I assure you I know nothing at all of entail;
pray don't think I do."

"Now that is cruel!" said Miss Dunn, opening her innocent blue eyes; "because I know nothing of entail, and I should have been so glad if you could have explained how Mr. Gray and Mr. Thomas Gray got rid of theirs. I always thought an entail was a dreadful sort of appendage; but they have cut theirs off as easily as if—oh! how clever, Miss. Carr! I should never have found that out. I shall certainly tell Mr. Gray how cleverly you settled the question. Of course, cutting off the entail is just like cutting off the tail! I shall certainly tell Mr. Gray."

"But I never said anything of the kind," I

cried, roused out of my apathy by this astounding remark, and especially by the threat of telling Mr. Gray—"I never said that entail and tail had the least analogy."

My vehement denial filled Miss Dunn with virtuous amazement. She began by declaring that she could not have imagined anything of the kind, she was far too stupid; then she assured me that if I would think well over it, I should find that I must have uttered that original and striking remark, &c., &c.; and having worried me nearly to tears, which, in my present mood, was no hard task, having also finished her wine, she apologized for leaving me, and went back to Miss Russell's room.

Again I was alone with the weary day before me. The clouds had melted into a settled grey; I convinced myself that it would not rain, and went out. The garden did not attract me; still less did I care for a little, formal, Chinese-looking pavilion, where Miss Russell often went and sat in the morning, whilst Miss Dunn read the paper to her. Nothing in Miss Russell's grounds attracted me; but neither

did I care to go near Gray's House. owner might not be in it, yet with that dwelling I had nothing to do. Mr. Herbert was cold and hard and estranged, and cared no more about me; so I went out into the silence and liberty of the open country, and took the direction which was exactly opposite to Gray's House. The quiet fields did me good; I met some children straggling along and plucking flowers, then I met no one, and went on alone till I reached a little brook. A few trees, still bare of leaves, rose straight, cold, and thin on either side of the water; the chill, grey sky looked back at me from the quiet surface of the little stream that flowed straight on between its two banks, of a cool, rank green. This little river made its way among the tall reeds and rushes, as majestic as a flood passing through mighty forest trees. I followed it curiously, but there was not much variety in its aspect. It went on quietly, telling me the same story of calm content, till it brought me, by a sudden turning to the other side of the watermill, which I had seen when I went to look at Gray's House.

It was an old mill, and evidently long disused, but so pretty and so picturesque that one could not wonder at its having been left standing there. As I now looked at it, wondering whether I should go on or turn back, heavy drops of rain began to fall, and I found that my friend the brook had led me into trouble. Some tall thickets close by made a sort of green niche, into which I crept; and there I stood and waited, trying to believe it was only a shower that was falling. As I stood thus, making a virtue of necessity, but feeling very wet and uncomfortable, a window of the mill, which till then had given no token of life, opened, a childish head peeped out, and darted back on seeing me, like a mouse into its hole; then darted out again, and watched me in my niche. I recognized the Ellinor of the wheelbarrow.

"Will you come in?" she asked, after a while. It was raining hard, yet I hesitated.

"I am all alone," she resumed, encouragingly.

The rain dripping upon me was reducing me .

fast to the condition of a water-nymph. I could not resist any longer—I nodded; Ellinor vanished, and soon appeared on the threshold of the door. I darted across, and was in.

"The best parlour is locked, but I can get the key," said Ellinor, eagerly.

"Oh! please if you have a fire in the kitchen let me go to it," I entreated.

Ellinor looked surprised, not to say disenchanted, at the lowness of my tastes; but seeing how wet I was, she yielded.

I have always thought a kitchen one of the prettiest rooms in a house; I confess that I like brass candlesticks on a chimney, and blue plates on a dresser, as well as clocks of gilt bronze, and Indian china. The miller's kitchen was a delightful place, and the bright fire on the hearth made it more attractive still. I spied out a low chair, took it to the fire, and sat there drying my wet feet.

The stormy wind blew gustily through the green creepers outside the window. The rain fell white and heavy with a rushing sound; the world without looked very wild, and all the

pleasanter looked the little homely world within. The room was low, large, and gloomy; but the pale ray of light that stole in through the window, touched on its way the plates on the dresser, a shining brass kettle, a sleepy tabby cat dozing on a chair, and little Ellinor's plump white shoulder and golden head, as she stood leaning against the brown old chimney, and looking at me with grave childish eyes, and the whole made a charming picture.

- "Are you often alone, Ellinor?" I asked, thinking how solitary a place this was for so young a child.
- "Well, no, not often—considering," answered Ellinor, dubitatively; "but I don't mind; boys are such a nuisance!"
 - "Have you no mother?"
- "Oh! dear no," said Ellinor, as if surprised at the suggestion.
 - "But you have your father?"
- "Oh! dear, yes," replied Ellinor, again surprised.
 - "And is he often out?"
 - "Always-in the gardens, you know."

I did not feel a right to put further questions. Time to do so failed me, as well as the inclination.

"Ellinor, Ellinor!" called a man's voice at the door, "will you let me into your kitchen? Mind you, I am dripping."

I looked round rather startled. Mr. Herbert did not see me yet, but I saw and knew him as he pushed open the door and stood for a moment on the threshold. Ellinor's offers of hospitality were not profuse.

- "You may come in," she said coolly.
- "Thank you, my dear."

He entered, and shook himself on the floor as he spoke. The spray from his wet garments reached me, and at the same moment he became aware of my presence. He coloured with a suddenness that showed his surprise.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

I bowed my head, then looked at the fire again. I felt that he would not have come in if he had known I was there. A profound silence followed. Ellinor took the cat, and, nursing it, walked up and down the kitchen. The fire

blazed, the wind blew above the chimney, the rain dashed furiously against the window-panes, and I wished myself far away.

How, why was it that Mr. Herbert and I were so much estranged? We had been good friends once, and though that friendship had cost me a life-long affection, I had not held him responsible for the evil he had unconsciously done me. But Mr. Herbert had never told me the reason for which Elizabeth and he had parted. Was it her doing or his? And had I unconsciously helped to separate them? I remembered her cold and alienated looks, and my heart sank. Had he bought his old liking for me at the cost of his man's love?—and now that we met again did he feel involuntary resentment against me? Oh! if it were so, his was a hard case indeed. But then was it so certain that the evil I had done was irreparable? Elizabeth's flight would give her liberty; and might not also this sudden breaking of her bondage restore her to the truest of lovers? Besides, would Mr. de Lusignan-

Here the cat uttered a pitiful mew-a protest

against Ellinor's nursing—which brought my day-dream to an abrupt close. I looked up with an involuntary start, and saw Mr. Herbert standing almost in the place which Ellinor had left, and thence looking down at me with a grave, attentive air.

- "I am afraid you are very wet," he said quietly.
- "Yes, rather so," I answered, a little troubled at having to speak.
- "Ellinor," said he, turning to the child, "please to put the kettle on."

I guessed the kettle was for me, but could not protest.

- "Which will you have, grog or tea?" asked Ellinor readily.
- "Tea to-day, my dear. You see, Miss Carr," he added, turning to me, "I cannot hide my misdeeds from you. Ellinor has let it out—I do come here and have grog sometimes."

His voice was so like the voice of old times that I could not help looking at him rather earnestly. His smiling face was the smiling face I knew so well. It was as if a mist had melted away from before me, and I saw things as they were, and not as I had fancied them. I got back my tongue at once.

"Then you often come here to see Ellinor?"
I remarked.

"Oh, yes. Ellinor and I are old friends; are we not, Ellinor?"

Ellinor nodded.

- "Perhaps you are not aware, Miss Carr, that our acquaintance ripened during a week's visit which I paid to Gray's House some time back."
- "Have you brought Polly?" here asked Ellinor, putting the kettle on the fire.
 - "No, Polly has remained behind."
- "And pray who is Polly?" I asked, with sudden curiosity.

Mr. Herbert looked slightly embarrassed.

- "A young friend of Ellinor's," he replied, shunning my look.
- "Then why did you not bring her?" asked Ellinor, in an aggrieved tone.
- "I hope you can let us have some eggs and ham?" hastily remarked Mr. Herbert.

- "But if the hen won't lay!" replied Ellinor, crossly.
 - "What, no eggs, Ellinor?"
 - "No-not one."
- "Oh! Ellinor, what will Miss Carr think of you?"

Miss Carr thought, but did not say so, that Mr. Herbert wished her to know nothing about Polly, and of course this mysterious Polly was the very thing she longed to know something of; but without giving me time to speculate on that subject, he remarked in a gay tone, that reminded me of the days long ago:

"I never saw you sitting by a kitchen fire before, Miss Carr, and as I look down at you now I cannot help thinking of little Cinderella. She was a great friend of mine when I was a boy."

"But I am not at all like Cinderella," I cried, rather affronted. "I do not dance with glass slippers on my feet, to begin with; and then I have more than two hundred a year of my own. Now Cinderella had not a farthing, according to the fairy-tales."

"True. Still you remind me of her, spite the two hundred a year. Do not give me that alarmed look, Miss Carr—I have got no sketchbook."

I looked up at him wistfully.

"Then you have really given up painting?" I said, in a tone of reget.

"What if I have?" he answered, with a smile. "What we do is not much, after all. What we are is the thing."

He spoke like one who knew that wherever he went his gifts went with him; but I could not let well alone.

"I am so sorry," I said.

"Are you sorry for that poor Eugène Herbert who wanted style?" he asked gaily. "Don't be sorry. True, he spent some bitter hours after he left you, but you see he has outlived them."

Then he had been unhappy—of course he had. Was he so still? I did not venture to put the question, but without looking at him, I said:

"Would you have come last night, if you had known whom you were to meet?"

"Why not?" he promptly answered; then in a lower tone he added, "He can dare much who knows how to suffer, Miss Carr."

Involuntarily I looked up at him; but his face, once so open, told me nothing. I read in it neither past nor present pain—nothing but the careless stoicism with which a man meets, or should meet, the inevitable troubles of life. I did not venture on another word.

The water was now boiling. Ellinor, who seemed to be a thorough little housewife, made the tea in an old metal tea-pot, set three blue cups and saucers on the table, cut some bread and butter, then drew a high chair forward, and perching herself upon it, took her tea with us.

The rain had almost ceased, the grey sky was clearing, and a yellow yet pleasant sun was sending in his flickering light through the kitchen-window on the floor, when Mr. Herbert, who sat facing me, suddenly remarked,

"I hope Mrs. Henry de Lusignan is quite well to-day."

I had forgotten her-not for long, but for a

few minutes she had left my mind, and the question recalled her back so abruptly and so painfully, that I nervously set down the teapot, from which I was pouring myself out some tea.

"She is gone to London," I said, shunning his look. "Her luggage was lost, and Watkins is very ill, it seems."

"Did she take Harry?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh! of course." I uttered the reply with my face almost in my cup. After awhile I looked up. Mr. Herbert was leaning back in his chair, with his untasted tea before him, and an expression of the greatest gravity on his face. He was looking at the fire, yet he seemed aware that my eyes were reading his countenance, for all at once his look sought mine.

"The bird found the cage open and took wing," he said in a low tone. "I guessed last night that it would be so."

I answered not one word. Little Ellinor, though conscientiously going through her tea and bread and butter, was scanning us very attentively, and listening to every word we uttered.

"I think it is not raining now," I said, when our silent meal was over.

"No, it is not," he answered, still looking very thoughtful. He rose. It was plain he meant to see me home. I would rather have returned alone; it was agonising to think of Miss Dunn seeing me come back under his escort. Oh! if I could have told him so! But as I could not, I submitted to my fate with that resigned stupidity which is one of the many sheepish attributes of youth.

Mr. Herbert did not suspect or did not care for the predicament he was putting me into. He stood patient, but evidently waiting, whilst I put on my waterproof, shook hands with Ellinor, and lingered as long as I could. Vain delay! When I left the mill he left it too, and as we walked out, he scarcely waited for the door to close upon us, before he said:

"So she is gone—gone at last! Shall we ever see her again, Miss Carr? I think not. I think she has vanished for ever, like any lost star. God bless her, wherever she may go!"

There was much emotion in his voice. I stood still and looked at him.

- "Why should you not follow and discover her?" I asked eagerly. "If she is gone you can find her——"
- "You know where she is!" he interrupted, with a sudden change in his face.
- "No," I replied, slowly and much grieved to damp his ardour. "I do not; but surely—surely you can discover her."
- Mr. Herbert's countenance resumed its tranquil expression at once.
- "Then she did not tell even you where she was going," he remarked—"not even you."
- "I did not see her. I was asleep, and she did not like to waken me, I suppose."
- "And that was your parting! She left you to Miss Russell and Miss Dunn!—and left you in your sleep, without one last word!"

I felt ready to cry, and I also felt very angry with Mr. Herbert, who made the hard truth still harder to bear.

"And what if she did!" I cried wrathfully.

"Is it her fault if every one will worry her to death, and she must fly like a poor hunted thing! I know she has been true to me. I

know that when I lay ill, and almost dying, she sat up night after night to mind me. I know that, and want to know no more. She is lost to me now, but she may not be lost to you; if you want her, follow her; and if you find her, Mr. Herbert, tell her I love her still—tell her I shall love her till I die."

I was crying now, and had to turn my head away. Mr. Herbert answered me not one word, but when I was calm again, gave me his arm, and so we walked on, in a silence that was not very friendly, till we reached Hanvil House. At the gate Mr. Herbert (to my great relief), left me. He said something about his splashed boots, and not being in a plight to appear before Miss Russell; and so we parted. I looked after him; he walked away from Gray's House, and in the direction of the railway.

"He is going to follow Elizabeth," I thought, with a beating heart. I went up to my room, at once, and changed my wet garments; then I went down to the drawing-room, ready to confront Miss Dunn. I was determined not to be browbeaten again, and felt quite valiant, not to

say aggressive. But is it not always so in life -when we are ready for an emergency, the emergency does not occur! Miss Dunn, as if she knew that I was bent on mischief, prudently remained upstairs with Miss Russell; and when I entered she drawing-room, the only company I found there was that of the fire burning steadily in the grate. The room looked large, lonely, and rather desolate. I felt tired and feverish; I ensconced myself within a deep armchair by one of the windows, and looked out on the garden. It was raining again, and the heavy drops dashed against the window panes. The wind, too, moaned gustily, with long fits of "Will he find her?" I thought. hoped he would. I hoped that Elizabeth would prize this faithful heart at last. I saw her relenting, I imagined them going off together somewhere for ever away. I cried a little, and I suppose I cried myself to sleep.

I do not think I slept long. When I woke with a start, the room was almost dark—not through the lateness of the hour, but because of the blackness of the sky. The fire burned red

and low, and there were long streaks of gloom on the carpet. All of a sudden the house was full of noise; the drawing-room door flew open, the light from the lamp in the hall came pouring in, and in that light the two figures of Mr. de Lusignan and Elizabeth entered abruptly.

"Well," she said, shutting the door, and keeping her hand upon it, as if to prevent him from escaping, "we are alone now, sir, and you shall hear me. You set a trap for me, and I fell into it, as you imagine. Do not think I did so with my eyes shut. I knew the risk I ran, and if I ran it, it is because to be free from you was worth any risk."

"That, at least, is candid," remarked Mr. de Lusignan, drily.

Elizabeth went up to Miss Russell's vacant chair, threw herself into it, and thence, looking at him defiantly, she asked:

- "Well, now that you have me, what will you do with me?"
- "Admire you, my dear, of course," was his ironical reply, "and take to heart the lesson

you have given me. I wanted to know if I could trust you alone with my grandson, and I cannot. I shall bear it in mind."

All this time I had been too much amazed to stir, but now I started up and ran to Elizabeth.

"Oh! Elizabeth! Elizabeth!" was all I could say, throwing my arms around her neck and kissing her. It was very selfish of me, but I could not help being glad at seeing her again.

"Why, Bessie! is that you?" she exclaimed, and her manner changed as if by magic. "Only think of the trick Watkins played upon me!—the foolish thing fancied she was desperately ill, when a bad cold was all that ailed her! Chance—or rather, I should say, Providence"—the word was uttered with slight bitterness—"made Mr. de Lusignan and me meet at the station, so he kindly took all trouble from my hands, managed Watkins, managed Harry, managed my luggage even—and here we are! Is it not lucky?"

And she laughed so lightly and so gaily that I was both amazed and perplexed.

"And where is Miss Russell, in whose chair

I am sitting?" resumed Elizabeth. "Ill in her room?—what a blessing! And Miss Dunn presides, does she? Well, then, I suppose I really must go upstairs and dress."

She rose, passed by me with a nod, and left the room. I remained alone with my guardian, who seemed to have forgotten me. I reminded him of my existence, by inquiring after Mademoiselle Aubrey.

"She is very well, I believe," he replied; "and you are well too, Bessie, I see," he added, holding out his hand; then, without giving me time to utter a word, "I saw Mr. Herbert, as we were driving from the station. What is he doing here?—painting? Has he long turned up in this part of the world?"

I confess I enjoyed my reply, which I uttered with studied indifference.

- "Only since he bought Gray's House, I believe."
 - "What!" exclaimed Mr. de Lusignan.
- "Only since he bought Gray's House," I repeated.

My guardian remained silent a few minutes;

his eyes were bent on the carpet; he raised them at last:

- "So he is a rich man now?" he said. "I had forgotten all about that concern of his. Does he come here?"
 - "He dined here yesterday."
- "And the other guests were—oh! the Grays. That will do; I know the set. Well, I too must go up and dress for Miss Dunn, I suppose."

He left me, to my great relief, and I ran up to Elizabeth at once. I was not sure that she wanted to see me, but I could not help it—I must go to her. I found her sitting alone opposite the mirror on the toilet-table, as if she wanted to read the face that looked back at her from its cold and careless depths.

- "May I come in?" I asked, from the door.
- "Yes, darling," she answered, without looking round—"come in."

I went up to her, and knelt down on the floor by her side. She laid her head on my shoulder, and moaned drearily—

"Oh! Bessie, Bessie," she said, "what a good thing it would be for me, if I could only be dead!—and I am still so young!—so young!

Not twenty-four!"

"And Harry?" I suggested.

"Oh, never mind Harry," she exclaimed pettishly. "Would not Mr. de Lusignan do for him? Good gracious!" she added with a start, "there's the dinner-bell. Go away, darling—go away. I must dress, you know."

I left her, for she seemed in a great hurry; but she made good speed, and when she came down, a quarter of an hour later, charmingly dressed and as lovely as ever, it would have been hard to detect a wish for death on her beautiful face. She came, too, quite prepared for Miss Dunn; and when that lady imprudently made a stealthy attack upon her outer works, Elizabeth repelled it with a vigour which showed that her heart was in the warfare, and did not retire from the field till her enemy was thoroughly routed. As for Mr. de Lusignan and me, we looked on, on the wise and humane principle of non-intervention.

CHAPTER VI.

THE afternoon was pitilessly hot. A burning July afternoon was this, which had mistaken its time and come in May, with a blue sky, no clouds, a parched earth, and grass so green and glistening that it made one feel hotter still to see it. Grass can look very moist and cool at evening-time, when flowers shut up and go to sleep, and pale mists steal forth and float over the earth, like sad spirits weeping balmy tears as they pass on; but at noontime, when every blade is straight and stiff like a little spear, and the very daisies lift up defiantly to the sun their shield of silver and gold, grass is hot, and has a hot look. The very waters by which I sat were bright and shining, and only gave back light and heat. I found it trying to sit thus looking at them; but I was too lazy to rise and walk to the house through a tract of burning sunshine. With moral cowardice, however, I shrank from the responsibility of either going or staying. Insidiously I appealed to my companion, Harry, who sat gravely by my side, his little fat legs stretched out rather wide apart, and his stumpy little feet in red shoes turned up.

"Too 'ot," he sententiously repeated, throwing a white pebble into the water.

"Then shall we stay here till dinner?" I continued.

"'Es, till dinner," echoed Harry, picking out another pebble and throwing it in.

The matter being thus decided, I took up my book once more, then let it fall again before five minutes were over.

I find it hard to read when Nature and I are alone together. I say alone, though Harry was with me, for a child has the happy gift of not being company. A mind speaking to me through the medium of a printed page is too little or too much. Nature—bright, joyous,

life-teeming Nature—bids me be all her own, and I obey her, no unwilling slave. I know there are some whom Nature never calls; no mysterious music comes forth from the forest depths, alluring them within-no winding path tempts them through shade and sunshine—no charm of form or colour bids them pause, as if to say "Behold me!"—no voice seems to speak from the depths of the tranquil lake, or in the murmurs of the garrulous brook. I believe these can read anywhere with perfect comfort They could read on Mont to themselves. Blanc or in Innisfallen; but, right or wrong, I cannot, and the little lake by which I now sat had so long a tale to tell to me, that no other story could tempt me away.

It had wholly escaped my knowledge during the first days of our stay at Hanvil House; a remark of my guardian's first revealed its existence to me.

"I hope Harry does not go near that water," he said on the morning after his arrival, and Miss Dunn immediately rejoined, "Oh! I hope not—horrid thing!"

"Water!—what water?" I asked; and I went and found it out, and my guardian's prohibition like many another before it, led to the accomplishment of the event he apprehended. I had given up going to look at Gray's House for good reasons, but I went and found out the little lake, and visited it daily; and Harry was now actually by its shores with me.

It was so pretty! A little fairy sheet of glancing waters, with broken, uneven shores, now half hidden by young trees. Here and there rushes and water-lilies reared their heads above its surface, then seemed to dip down again as if they liked better being within, under the cool water, than out and up in the hot sun. A brown rock, with a round mossy cap of a bright golden green, glittered in the distance like a fairy islet. That was all, but it was much to me, such as it was; moreover, the hand of man had not set it there. It was a true lake, no counterfeit; it was my first lake too, and had to me a charm very different from that of the little running stream by Ellinor's mill. For the brook, as it bounds along, tells us of life.

motion, adventure, and infinite variety. follows its glancing current, and wonders whither it is going-what pastoral landscapes, what villages it passes by, what cities it seeks (ah, how unwisely!) in short, what it means to do on its way through the world. The lake uses other language. Its mystery lies inward. Hence old stories make it the scene of enchantment which live running waters break. In the lake you will find O'Donoghue's palace, and many a Prince of Tierna Oge. The lake keeps King Arthur's sword, and guards his sleep. Its deep waters tell us none of its se-We do not trust it quite, yet we cannot crets. resist its smile; and as I looked at this one now, I thought of Elizabeth—beautiful, charming, and unfathomable—of Elizabeth, who, since the day that followed her return with Mr. de Lusignan, had been lying ill of fever. She would see no doctor-she said she was not ill enough for that, but she kept her room, and sometimes her bed; and when she attempted to come down of an evening, she was as brilliant and lively as ever, but invariably was ill again the next morning.

But Harry, who took no pleasure in silent meditations, here rather pettishly put an end to mine by imperiously saying:

"Gi' me de book, gi' me de moder-o'-pearl!"
Which, translated into English, meant, "Give
me your mother-of-pearl card-case."

"I have not got it here, Harry!" I replied; then suddenly starting up, I cried: "Oh, Harry, Harry, I have lost it! I must have lost it!"

I was more distressed than I can say. That little mother-of-pearl card-case was the last gift I had received from James Carr. His hand had put it into mine before he had learned to doubt me, and I never looked at it but the happy days it recalled all came back before me. And now it was gone, really gone. I remembered distinctly that I had put it into my pocket before going out on the day of Elizabeth's flight, and that pocket I had emptied of its contents an hour ago. I must have lost it, but how or where? Perhaps at the mill. Hope asked no better than to revive at the suggestion. I started to my feet, and, spite the vehement op-

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position of Harry, who, if he wanted the motherof-pearl book, wanted it then and there, I insisted upon going back to the house at once; and having in my hands the last argument of kings and nations, force, I had my way, spite some vehement protests in the way of kicking and scratching, which Harry administered with a vigour and zeal worthy of a better fate. We had not walked a hundred yards before we met Mr. de Lusignan.

"So you were there—really there, by that horrible water with the child!" he exclaimed, pale with emotion and wrath at seeing that we came from the forbidden lake. "Have I not said that he was never to go nigh it, never!"

"We did not intend it," I faltered, rather frightened at seeing him in such a fury, "but I took him from Watkins because Elizabeth is so ill that I thought she might want her."

"And you had a book!" he exclaimed looking at the volume in my hand; "and whilst you were reading your trashy novel the boy might have fallen in, and—Bessie, Bessie, you do not know what that child is to me! He is all that is

left to me now—from the wreck of a wasted life."

He took the boy's hand as he spoke, and leaving me there abashed and mute he walked away. I took a round in order avoid him as I went back to the house, but failed in my object. The very path I chose led me straight to a shady portion of the flower-garden, where Harry and his grandfather were seated on a bench discussing the lake. The boy, who was quick enough in his way, and who knew that I had been scolded about him, took care to say in a loud voice as I passed:

- "Bessie 'ad a book, and I got into de water."
- "Nonsense!" said his grandfather, looking vexed; "you did not, Harry."
- "I did!" screamed Harry, getting very red in the face, and clenching his fists as if he were ready for battle—"'ou know I did!—'ou said I did!"

My guardian did not venture to contradict the little tyrant, under whose yoke he had placed his stiff neck. I was magnanimous, and feigning deafness, walked on. All search in my room for the card-case proved vain, as I had expected that it would. My only chance now lay at the mill, and to it I went at once, regardless of the heat.

The mill was silent, and seemed deserted; the door stood wide open, but there was not a soul about the place. It looked as if corn had never been ground there! I remained on the threshold, and called out "Ellinor." No one answered me save the tabby cat, who came downstairs humping her back, lifting up her tail, and uttering a pitiful mew, which might be a mew of welcome, for all I could tell. I tried the parlour door, but it was locked; not without some uneasiness, I made my way to the kitchen, and opening the door cautiously, I peeped in-Ellinor was not there. There was no one there save Mr. Herbert, who stood by the window, looking at something in his hand. My heart leaped with joy, as I recognised my property.

"Oh! I am so glad you have got it!" I eagerly exclaimed, coming forward. "I was so much afraid that I had lost it."

Mr. Herbert looked round, and handed me my card-case, with a smile.

"I saw it was yours," he said, "and I was going to take it to you. I have only just found it here."

"And I have only just missed it; and I am so glad to have found it! James gave it to me, and I value it all the more that he and I are no longer friends."

Mr. Herbert was putting the card-case into my hand as I said this; he raised his surprised eyes to mine, with a doubtful and perplexed meaning on his face—the meaning of one who hears, but can scarcely trust his hearing.

"No," I replied, "we have not met since we parted in Fontainebleau—did you think we had? Don't you know that James is gone to Australia?"

Mr. Herbert bowed his head in silent assent; I reddened. I felt as if he were blaming me, and yet, if James and I were parted for ever, the fault was surely none of mine!

"We are not friends," I repeated, "and shall never be friends again; but I am all the better pleased to have his gift once more—and thank you cordially, Mr. Herbert."

"You owe me little thanks," he said, smiling perhaps at my formal tone. "I have been away from home since you left this here, otherwise you should have had it earlier."

I started with sudden recollection:

"Perhaps you do not know that Elizabeth has come back?" I said, eagerly.

"No, indeed." he exclaimed, taken by surprise—"come back! I did not know that."

"It was impossible you should find her," I continued, heedlessly; "she came back with Mr. de Lusignan on the very day that you went off to look for her."

"But, excuse me," he said, very gravely; "I have not been looking for her. I have neither the right nor the inclination to do so," he added, so coldly that I remained silent and abashed before him.

How well I remember that moment! Mr. Herbert and I stood on the sunlight kitchen floor, looking at each other, calm reproaches in his eyes, and assuredly some confusion in mine.

I thought only of the vexation of the moment, and all the time Grief, like a keen marksman, was lying in wait for me, and biding his hour. I was going to say something, I do not know what, when a series of little steps came pattering down the stairs, the kitchen door, which I had left ajar, was burst open, and a little redhaired girl in black rushed in, and running up to Mr. Herbert, without heeding me, she cried, in a passion of sobs and tears:

- "Oh! Georgy!—Ellinor won't; she says she won't, Georgy——"
- "Won't what, Polly?" he asked, rather gravely.

This, then, was Polly! I looked at her curiously, then, uttering a sudden, sharp cry of fear and pain, I recognized her.

"Oh! Polly, Polly!" I cried, "what brings you here? Where is James?—where is he?"

Polly turned round her little surprised face towards me, whilst Mr. Herbert, whose right hand rested kindly on the child's head, gave me a look of silent pity. James was dead! I read it in his face, in Polly's black garments—above

all, in her presence here. The blow was terrible. It fell upon me like a bolt from heaven; my arms dropped, James's little gift slipped from my hand upon the floor, and broke as it fell. I did not fall myself, but I felt turned to stone, and looking at Mr. Herbert, all I could say was:

"Dead!—James is dead!"

I could not cry then. The tears, which came later and relieved me, seemed for ever dried up in their source, but a pain so acute that it was like the agonized parting of soul and body seized me.

"James—dear James!" I said; and sitting down on a chair that stood by me, I laid my head upon the table and moaned aloud in my anguish. That, too, went by. After awhile I could look up again, and question and listen. The tale Mr. Herbert had to tell me was both sad and brief.

"When I left Fontainebleau last year," he said, "I went to Australia, as you know."

I shook my head. I had known nothing of the kind.

"My stay was a short one. Almost on the eve of my return home I received a message from James Carr, asking to see me. I went, of course. I found him dying of a fever, contracted by the sick-bed of his two eldest sisters, who had already died of it a week before. Polly alone had escaped—perhaps because she had been removed from the house in time. James knew that I was in Sydney—he remembered that we were related, and had been friends, and maybe he felt on his death-bed that he had wronged me, and he now asked me to care for the child. I promised to do so, and that is how I got Polly," he added, caressing Polly's little red head.

"Did James give you no message for me?" I asked.

Mr. Herbert hesitated.

"He mentioned you," he replied, "but he sent no message."

I did not ask what James had said of me. He had done tardy justice to Mr. Herbert, but I guessed that for me there had been none. To the end James had wronged me. "And that was how James died," I said.

"He who was so young still, so strong—that was how he died!"

"Yes," sadly said Mr. Herbert, "that was how, and his hardest tribulation in his last hours which I witnessed was the not seeing his little Polly again. "If I could only see her!" he moaned—"if I could only see her—the last of the three—the only one left—if I could only see her!"

The words brought him back so vividly before me; his kind, loving face as he sat in Mrs. Dawson's parlour with his three little sisters around him, was so present to me, as Mr. Herbert spoke, that the tears rushed to my eyes, and flowed down my cheeks.

"Oh! Mr. Herbert," I said, when I could speak, "you must give me Polly, indeed you must. I will care for her truly. I will rear her, and keep her and provide for her—for though you do not say so, I see very well that James had nothing to leave to her."

"No, poor fellow, not a farthing—it was all gone."

"Well, then, let me have her," I pleaded. "I know you are rich and generous, but James was my cousin, and surely the task of rearing his little sister, the only one left, as he said, belongs to me."

Mr. Herbert hesitated, but did not deny my prayer; he only remarked:

- "You forget that you are not your own mistress, and that Mr. de Lusignan, who so strangely left you in ignorance of your cousin's death, may object to your assuming such a burden, and undertaking such a task."
- "If he consents, do you?" I asked, rather impetuously.
- "Yes," he answered, without the least hesitation.
- "Well, then, he is within now—will you come with me and ask him at once?"

I rose as I spoke. I felt as if a moment's delay were more than I could bear—as if to have Polly, and have her immediately, were the only comfort my grief could know.

"I will do anything you wish," he answered, readily.

"Well, then, I do wish that," I replied, with some passion. "What else have I left to wish for? You do not know—how should you, since he did not?—what James Carr was to me!"

Mr. Herbert did not answer this; he took Polly by the hand, and we left the cottage together. Ellinor, who, after her difference with Polly, had remained upstairs, looked out after us from a bed-room window, and saw us depart with a blank, perplexed face.

An hour's time had not altered the road between the cottage and Hanvil House, but that hour, so full of sorrow to me, had so changed its aspect in my eyes, that it was as if I had never trod these paths, as if I had never seen these fields and meadows before. Twice I had to sit down and cry, my heart was so full; and once whilst Polly was hunting butterflies, I said to Mr. Herbert, who stood silent by my side—

- "You say that James mentioned me. What did he say?"
- "I will tell you, if you wish it," he replied, "but I would rather you did not ask me."

- "And so he was angry with me to the end?" I said, disconsolately. "Oh, Mr. Herbert, that is very hard! I loved him so truly, and if he had not been so exacting, I would have married him—indeed I would!"
- "He could not help being exacting," remarked Mr. Herbert, rather quickly.
- "But you don't know," I argued; "poor dear James really asked too much."
- "No, Miss Carr," very positively said Mr. Herbert; "he only asked for the one thing which you could not give—if he had got it, James would have been content."
- "So you too blame me!" I exclaimed, drearily—"even you think I wronged him!"
- "No, no; I never said that! Do I not say you could not give him what he wanted? Do not blame yourself, Bessie; the thing James Carr wanted was no more in your power to bestow than it was in Elizabeth's for me."
- "But you are not angry with Elizabeth," I persisted—"I can see you are not; and James was angry with me to the end, and that is hard."

I was looking up at him as I spoke. I saw the tell-tale blood rush up to his face, and dye it; he crimsoned, even to the roots of his fair hair; he laughed, with a light, forced laugh, and half turned his head away, as if to look at Polly, as he replied, in a rather vexed tone:

"You judge me too favourably, Miss Carr."

He was not cured, after all; I had always thought so, spite his implied denial, and I was not surprised. At another time I might have challenged his confidence, but now my own sorrow was heavy. James was dead, and I could think of no one's loves and hopes, when he who had loved me so truly, though so unkindly, lay in his grave across the seas. Mr. Herbert did not want me to think of him or his concerns.

"Are you sure that the child will not be too much for you?" he asked seriously. "To me she is no trouble. I shall send her to school soon, and I have got a maid for her, in the meanwhile; but if you mean to keep her——"

"I mean to keep her, and she will be no trouble," I interrupted. "I may have to send

her to school till I am of age, but, after that, Polly shall remain with me till she is grown-up."

Mr. Herbert attempted no further argument. I rose, and we spoke no more till we reached Hanvil House. My guardian stood in the shade with his back towards us, superintending the building of a mud and pebble edifice which Harry was raising, to the infinite detriment of his garments.

"You are all wrong, Harry," Mr. de Lusignan was saying, "your castle will fall at the enemy's first shot—look!"

He took a stone, aimed it with a sure hand, and down tumbled the fortress which Harry had been rearing with some trouble. The boy took the experiment very ill, and uttering a cry of mingled anger and dismay, he flew at his grandfather to put into practice the ever-readiest argument of children. Mr. de Lusignan laughed, put him away, and turning round as he did so, saw Mr. Herbert, Polly, and me.

Our aspect sobered him at once, and even Harry suspended his attack in the first moment of surprise. I think also there was something in my grief too visible to escape my guardian's perception. I saw his face change as he advanced to greet Mr. Herbert, and his look fell with a troubled, perplexed meaning upon Polly. Mr. Herbert was quite at his ease. His manner was quiet, his speech was courteous, his look was free; but Mr. de Lusignan remained strangely constrained, and still kept looking at Polly and me. I spoke first:

"My cousin, James Carr, is dead, sir," I said; "did you know it?"

He did not answer; I resumed:

"I think it hard, sir, very hard, that you did not let me know the death of my only surviving relative."

"Oh, of course!" replied Mr. de Lusignan, frowning, and with a slight, impatient gesture of his hand; "you think many things hard, Bessie. You thought it hard once that I would not let you marry Mr. Carr off-hand. However good and estimable he may have been, did you think me so much mistaken some months later?"

This was all very true, but I only felt that to save himself the sight of my sad face and black garments, Mr. de Lusignan had wilfully kept me ignorant of James Carr's death.

"I had a right to know that my cousin was dead," I retorted. "I had a right to know it."

"You kept none," coldly answered my guardian: "you parted from him with reproaches on your lips, and there was no reconciliation. He left you no legacy, no memorial, that I am aware of, and the only information which I, as your guardian, got on this matter was the 'Deaths,' in the *Times*."

I nearly broke down at this unkind reminder of the past, but I controlled myself, and answered as calmly as I could:

"James had nothing to leave, sir, save Polly, his only surviving sister. Mr. Herbert got her in Australia, and brought her back, but surely I have the best right to adopt her and provide for her. I cannot do so yet without your consent. Will you give it?"

"Is she any relation of yours?" he asked.

"None. She was James's half-sister; but I shall love her dearly for his sake."

I expected a sharp and prompt denial; I had

all sorts of arguments in readiness; but to my surprise my guardian said very gently:

"You shall please yourself, Bessie."

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" I cried, in sudden joy: and turning round to Polly, I took her up in my arms and kissed her, whilst Harry, who had been slowly reconnoitering Mr. Herbert, crept up to him and looked up in his face with shy recognition. What passed then in Polly's mind? Did she imagine that an exchange was going to take place—that I was to have a Polly, and Mr. Herbert to get a Harry instead? Did she consider my embrace as a sort of immediate taking of possession of her little person by me, and was she affronted at being thus disposed of without her consent? Heaven knows, certain it is that, when I thus kissed her, Polly struggled for liberty, got out of my arms, and bursting into a flood of tears, rushed back to Mr. Herbert, vehemently pushing Harry away.

"I won't go with her!" she sobbed; "I won't —oh, Georgy—I won't go with her!"

She clung to his legs, and then turning round

scowled at me, and viciously giving poor Harry a kick, she screamed indignantly; "You go away—will you?"

I was so confounded at this rebuff that I could not utter one word. As for Harry, so valiant with his grandfather, he looked perfectly terrified at this unexpected assault of his little red-haired enemy, and fled in evident dread of a fresh attack. Mr. de Lusignan laughed rather drearily.

"Is that your luck, Bessie?" he said. "Then give up Polly, Mignonne, give her up."

I did not answer. My disappointment was too bitter and too keen. At this moment, moreover, two new personages came upon the scene—Miss Russell wheeled in her yellow chair by Miss Dunn, who, having seen us from afar,—Miss Russell was short-sighted—had imparted her own curiosity to her patroness.

"What has happened?" asked Miss Russell, bending forward eagerly; "a battle-royal between that young lady and Harry! Miss Carr in tears! Mr. Herbert, have you caused her grief?"

"I hope not," he answered, smiling at this abrupt address. "I hope, too, you are quite well to-day, Miss Russell."

"Oh, very well, thank you—pray excuse my rudeness, but you know me, I am the most uncivilized person—" (how true, I thought!)—"and now do tell me what has happened."

"Simply that Mignonne wanted to adopt this young lady, who prefers Mr. Herbert's guardianship to hers," sarcastically answered Mr. de Lusignan.

"Come, Polly, let us have your mind once more—will you go with Miss Carr, or——"

"I'll die first," interrupted Polly, giving me a very evil look.

"Stay with Mr. Herbert," continued my guardian.

"Oh, yes, I'll stay with Georgy," very readily said Polly.

Mr. de Lusignan laughed.

"Why, what a charmer you are, Mr. Herbert!" he said.

"But Mr. Herbert is such a charmer," here remarked Miss Dunn. "I remember that all pups

and kittens and birds used to like him so much."

All this time Mr. Herbert's hand was caressing Polly's head, as it lay resting against him. When Miss Dunn spoke thus, he looked up at her and smiled, but said not one word. I do not know by what intuition I guessed the meaning in his eyes, nor in what spirit of mischief I remarked suddenly:

- "Did they not also like you, Miss Dunn?"
- "Not much," she answered, coolly.
- "Not much!" screamed Miss Russell; "my dear, cats, dogs, and children all hate you! Look at Harry, he can't bear you, can he? As to birds," she added, musingly, "I don't know—perhaps birds like you."
- "Not much," imperturbably replied Miss Dunn. "I have no doubt they come and perch on Mr. Herbert's head, but they never come to me."

Mr. Herbert smiled again; if Miss Dunn had been a bird herself, pecking at him in her puny malice, she could not have moved him less than she did. I felt—rather late, it is true—that I had helped to bring this on; my heart was full

of other things, and turning to him, I said, in a low tone:

"You were right, I see. Polly must stay with you, Mr. Herbert, thank you all the same." And having said this, I walked away with my sorrow and left them so.

I went up to my room; I laid my head on my pillow and stayed thus till dusk; then I stole in to Elizabeth. She was up, sitting by her open window, gazing drearily at the sullen sky,—for the hot day looked as if it would end in stormy rain. I took a cushion, put it at her feet, and sitting down upon it, I laid my head upon her lap and said:

- "I am very miserable, Elizabeth."
- "Are you, Mignonne?" she replied, stooping over me; "what has happened?"
- "James is dead." I burst into a passion of sobs and tears as I said it.
- "Dead! Oh, Bessie, is that possible? How do you know it?"

I told her. I told her also how I wanted to take and keep Polly, who had chosen to abide with Mr. Herbert, and I said again:

- "I am very miserable, Elizabeth."
- "Poor little thing!—I dare say you are," she rejoined, kindly.
- "I am the most miserable creature alive," I added with a sob.
- "No, Bessie," she replied, drearily. "I know one who is more wretched than you are."

I gazed up in her pale face. Oh, how sad, how very sad it looked in that grey light! What depths of despair there were in her blue eyes! What lines of unspeakable sorrow in her compressed lips! I asked if she would go down to dinner; Elizabeth shook her head in denial.

"I cannot go down and talk; besides, where is the use? I could not eat a morsel—I feel I could not."

Elizabeth raised no objection. So I stayed thus with her, my head lying on her lap, and her hand resting upon it as she leaned back in her chair, looking with her sad eyes at the evening sky. It soon began to rain. Oh, how soothing I felt this weeping and wailing of Nature! I liked that low moaning wind, and those

heavy drops pattering upon the young leaves of the trees! Was it raining upon James's grave? Where was it? I wondered; in what sort of a spot? Were there roses near it? Did roses grow in Australia?—such roses as he had set for me in the home that was to have been mine? And so my thoughts wandered, and my tears flowed at every picture memory called back, till, worn out and weary, I unconsciously fell asleep. When I woke it was quite dark; the window was still open, but the rain had ceased and the evening was as sultry as ever.

- "Elizabeth," I said softly, "are you awake?"
- "Yes, darling," she answered, quietly.
- "Did you not sleep?"
- "Oh, no."
- "And you stayed quiet all this time?"
- "Why not? You were sleeping, and I know it would do you so much good."

I rose and kissed her. I felt as if, in our mutual sorrow, all the old affection had come back. I felt as if we both, Elizabeth and I, could now grieve apart from other happy ones, and make our moan above the two graves of our dead.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next day was Sunday. I woke early, and dressed at once to go to the little Catholic church which stood some three miles away at the end of the village. I took a rose out of my hat. I put on the only black dress I had, and having thus sobered my aspect, I went downstairs and left the house alone, and without meeting anyone save a housemaid. My road took me through meadows, where cows who stood knee-deep in the grass, grazed on steadily, as if life had no other object to them than the production of butter and milk. How beautiful were those meadows! How gorgeous looked the crimson fields of sainfoin! How tender and lovely was the aspect of that early sky. How low and dim and dreary lay the far horison! And alas, alas! how heavy felt my sorrowful heart! For I remembered another Sunday morning, when James and I had gone through Kensington Gardens together, arm in arm, on our way to Spanish Place. I remembered the deep shadow of the old trees, the bright sunshine on the grass, his handsome young face turned to mine, the very stillness of the church, the aspect of the altar, the look of the white-headed priest who preached, and the text of his sermon—all returned to me like things of yesterday, and with them the burden of my grief: Dead, dead!

James was dead for ever. There was no cancelling that doom. Separation, estrangement are bitter, but the gates are not closed, or, if they are, there is always a gleam of light stealing through the chinks. We know that these doors, fast as they may seem, can be unlocked again, but what ray of this world has ever pierced the utter darkness of the grave? The other life indeed is eloquent with tender promises, but this life, with its hopes and dreams and passions and vicissitudes, is silent, so far as

the dead are concerned. I tried to take my mind away from these thoughts in the chapel, but I could not; do what I would, they came back to me. Grief is the great master whom we must all obey. My eyes read, but my mind was not with words on the printed page; my ears heard the voice of the priest, but it sounded far away, as if it came to me through a dream; I knelt, but my body alone obeyed that form of worship; only one thing I could do, and that I did—oh! how passionately, how eagerly, as my tears flowed behind my veil!—and that was, to pray for James Carr.

As I left the chapel and crossed the porch, I found myself face to face with Mr. Herbert and Polly. On seeing me the child shrank behind him.

"You need not, Polly," I said, in a subdued voice. "I will never again attempt to take you away. You were not given to me, and no doubt James knew best."

My voice shook a little as I uttered his name, but otherwise I think I bore up pretty well. Save that he asked me kindly enough how I was, Mr. Herbert made no allusion to what had passed between us the day before. He walked by me for a little while, Polly keeping safely on the other side of him; and we spoke of anything save that one thing which was ever before me; then, when our roads parted, he left me.

I did not bid Polly good-bye, for by her bearing Polly plainly showed me that she could not so readily forget the unlucky attempt I had made to adopt her; but with a heavy heart I looked after her as she danced by Mr. Herbert's side. She had been the darling of James Carr, and how hard he must have found it to leave her behind him! If I only could have had her, if I only could have petted and cherished her for his sake!—but he had been angry with me to the last, and that too was hard.

Sorrow is a heavy burden to carry. I soon felt weary, and sat down on a bank to rest. Sunday stillness was on the spot. The fields were all very quiet, not a soul was within view; the air was still, save when wild bees, reckless of Sabbath observance, hovered over the meadow, gathering honey with a low hum. I looked

around me, and tried to feel the beauty of God's world, but could not, for the dead one, estranged, reproachful, and dying far away, was ever by me, upbraiding me with the days that were gone.

"Oh! if he had only forgiven me!" I thought, "if he only had!" And because he had not, and I knew it, I buried my face in my hands, and cried bitterly. The sound of a step roused me suddenly. I looked round quickly. Mr. Herbert was coming towards me, but Polly was not with him.

- "I beg your pardon," he said, "but I have something to say which could not be said in Polly's presence. Her maid came for her, so I turned back to speak to you. May I do so?"
 - "Yes, surely," I replied hesitatingly.
- "I mean to send Polly to school," he said; "tell me where you are to be, and Polly shall go to school as near you as can be managed."
- "And will you do this!" I cried joyfully.
 "Oh, how good you are! Oh, Mr. Herbert, how can I thank you sufficiently?"
 - "Then you like this plan?" he said kindly.

"Like it! Oh, Mr. Herbert, can I wish for more? And I will do my best for Polly. Oh, you may rely upon that. I shall go and see her every Sunday, and take her out walking, and try to improve her. I shall make her presents, give her books, good books; then pretty things to please her—dolls whilst she is little, and when she grows up, a handsome desk or a workbox, or a dressing-case, or anything of the kind; and then, perhaps, when I am of age, Polly will like me enough to come and stay with me for ever."

"For ever!" he repeated, rather gravely.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," I cried, "I am so selfish. I must not rob you of Polly—I must not!"

Mr. Herbert smiled, and begged that I would have no scruple on that head. He was fond of Polly, to be sure, but he was also afraid of spoiling her, which would be a pity. I was alarmed at the prospect, and begged that he would not spoil Polly—dear James did so object to spoiled children.

"But what am I to do?" he asked. "Polly

will not learn, and Polly will get on my back and pull my hair."

"Punish her," I said, inexorably.

"But how so? I cannot whip Polly,"—I was horrified at the suggestion—"or put her on bread and water;"—this was as bad as the whipping—"and for scolding Polly does not care."

"Put her in a corner," I suggested.

Mr. Herbert's eyes were so full of fun at this educational view that, with the prompt response of youth, I burst out laughing; but the laughter died on my lips, and turning my head aside, I cried anew.

"Oh, what a wretch I am!" I exclaimed. "I have not learned his death twenty-four hours, and I can laugh!—I can laugh! He would not have laughed if anyone had told him, 'Your little cousin Bessie is dead.' It would have broken his heart—I know it would, for he always loved me ten times more than I loved him."

Mr. Herbert let me sob my grief away; then, when I was calm again, he said,

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"It seems to me that you loved him very much."

"Of what use was my love, since he did not believe in it?" I asked. "Oh! Mr. Herbert, my very heart is pierced with regret and remorse. I now see what a blank life is without James Carr. Oh! do not do as I did. If she has offended you, forgive her, and, since you have found her again, try to win her back, or your heart will ache some day, as mine aches now."

Mr. Herbert looked at me, then bit his lip, and turned his head away. If I had not been absorbed in my sorrow, I must have seen how displeased he was; but I did not. It was only later that the meaning of his cold, averted looks came back to me; yet I had a vague feeling that he was not very well content, for I pursued,

"I speak so, Mr. Herbert, because we were such good friends once, and because you are so generous to me about Polly. I cannot help hoping that she will like me in the end. I shall never marry, never—and if Polly will only stay with me——"

"Of course—of course," almost interrupted

Mr. Herbert, with an abruptness very strange in him; "but what school am I to send her to in the meanwhile? Where does Mr. de Lusignan mean to reside?"

The question brought me back from dreamland to reality. I knew nothing of my guardian's intentions, and as he probably had none, it was useless to question him. All my hopes of Polly, and rearing her my own way, and keeping her for ever, vanished in a moment. I looked at Mr. Herbert with a blank face as I said:

"I had forgotten; it cannot be. Mr. de Lusignan himself never knows one day where he will be the next. How can you put Polly to school near me, since I do not know where I shall be? Pray don't say any more about it. You mean it so kindly; but the disappointment is almost more than I can bear."

I rose as I spoke. Mr. Herbert seemed to feel the force of my argument, for he uttered not one word against it; indeed, he walked in perfect silence by my side till I reached the road that took me straight to Hanvil House, and there we parted.

"Think of what I said, Mr. Herbert," I urged, as my hand lay in his.

"Thank you, I will," he replied, dropping my hand as if it burned him.

I felt it was rash in me to probe his wound so soon, and I added, rather timidly—

"I speak so, because I cannot bear that you should some day go through the bitter grief I have gone through since yesterday—a grief which I must bear with me to my grave."

"Thank you," he said again; and so, as I said, we parted, he to go back to Polly—happy man!—and I to return to a house where no one, save Elizabeth, cared for my sorrow.

My way lay through the orchard, and as, leaving it, I raised the latch of the little gate that divided it from the garden, I nearly started back at finding myself face to face with my guardian and his daughter-in-law. To see Mr. de Lusignan was nothing, but to see Elizabeth out dressed to perfection, and, though a little pale, in good health and, to all appearance, in excellent spirits, was a surprise.

"Why, where have you been?" she asked

gaily; then, perceiving my book—"Ah! I see," she added, nodding.

"Bessie is always very good," remarked my guardian.

I ignored this speech, and looking at Elizabeth, "I suppose you are going to church?" I said.

"No," she answered, rather shortly.

"My dear," observed Mr. de Lusignan, gravely, "why don't you take pattern on Bessie? Why don't you go to church? I could not accompany you, we two not being of the same faith; besides, I never go myself, not being able to keep quiet; but still I should like you to go."

"I only go when I like it," answered Elizabeth drily.

"My love, that is not often. Take pattern on Bessie, I say."

This was ill-natured, but it was also intolerant, and sprang from intolerance; for I suppose the godly are not the only ones who cannot endure any way of thinking but their own. I have found that the spirit of persecution is strong in the ungodly too, and that they can be sharp and bitter with such as do not happen to think like themselves. My guardian was so, at least. The restraint of sitting quietly in a church for half an hour being too much for him, he resented that it should not be so for everyone else. I believe, however, that my sad face soon made him repent his ill-nature, for he added, with sudden kindness,

"Never mind me, Bessie; go your way, it is a good one." And taking out a cigar, he went into the orchard to smoke it alone.

"I wonder if he ever prays?" said Elizabeth, looking after him. "I suppose he does—we all do. Don't think me quite a heathen, Bessie. I cannot help it. I cannot pray at set hours and on set days."

There was no answering this. If Elizabeth did not know that prayer is an act of filial obedience as well as of filial love, no telling of mine would convince her of that truth.

"You seem well again, Elizabeth," I said to her, not knowing what to say.

"Oh! yes," she carelessly answered, "I am

well enough. Have you had any breakfast? No! Ah! no wonder, then, that you look so pale. Go in and get something to eat, child."

She spoke kindly, and laid her hand on my shoulder as she spoke; but I felt that Elizabeth did not want my presence. She on whose lap my weary head had rested the evening before, had already vanished, and this was the Elizabeth who, as she kept her own sorrow locked in her own heart, asking none to help her in bearing it, would not be made partaker in strange grief. All that I had raised upon the sand foundation of her fellow-feeling for me died away as she told me to go and take my breakfast. The shears of the fatal sister never cut a thread of life more surely than this bit of advice snapped my frail web of hope asunder.

Elizabeth liked me, but she would have none of me, and she had left her room and come down for the very purpose of shunning me and my sorrow. I submitted—what else could I do?—and walked alone towards the house. As I passed by the Chinese pavilion, I found Miss Russell sitting there in her yellow chair, and for once she was alone.

"Good morning, Miss Carr," she said airily, holding out a friendly hand as she spoke.

I answered her greeting soberly enough; and looking in my face with her black eyes, in which beamed sudden softness, she said kindly—

"Ah! to be sure, you have got your trouble. Well, it is sad. Only you never thought to see him again, and he was not the one with whom you wished to spend your days, was he?"

"I loved him dearly," I answered, rather uneasy at the turn her consolatory remarks were taking.

"Of course; but if he had put you by for some one else, that would have been hard, Miss Carr. You don't know how hard; for anyone can see you have not got that danger to fear from some one whom you and I know."

"Oh! pray, Miss Russell," I exclaimed, much alarmed, "don't run away with that idea—pray don't!"

"My dear Miss Carr," she interrupted, "I can't run away, not even with an idea; but I have eyes, and can see."

"But I assure you," I exclaimed, in despair,

"that no one cares about me, and that I want no one to care about me."

"Then is Mrs. Henry the person cared for?" she asked, with sudden eagerness. "If so, why don't they marry at once?" she added, fastening her eyes full upon my face.

"I don't know," I faltered, rather bewildered at her point-blank and rapid questions. "I suppose they don't like."

"Perhaps she went to London the other day to get registered," she said, without heeding me. "I should not wonder."

I was very ignorant in those days, and registering, as a social institution, was an utter mystery to me.

"Registered!" I repeated.

"Yes, registered!" impatiently replied Miss Russell. "Formerly a girl was clothed in white, and wreathed and veiled, and led to the altar, and it was generally understood that she was doing a very awful thing, and was no better than a young lamb adorned for a life-long sacrifice. The whole world was called upon to see it, just as the Greeks gathered to see that girl

whose name I have forgotten. Now people get registered in an office, and as they do not at all know how long the journey for which they are booking themselves will last, why, they keep quiet about it; because, you see, we have registered marriages and Divorce Courts—very convenient, very useful, both of them. The old thing was barbarism, but to register couples as one registers luggage is civilization. I wonder they don't number and label them. They ought to, for fear of mistakes. Well, I suppose they do—I suppose they do."

I listened to her amazed; but all Miss Russell saw in my perplexity was the proof of my ignorance. Her face fell a little.

"Perhaps they are not registered, after all," she said. "I don't see why they should be. He need not be afraid of anyone, and what need she care for her father-in-law? Of course they are not registered," she added, positively; "and of course he's not the man. Mrs. Henry likes handsome horses, and Mr. Gray's chestnuts are unrivalled. My dear, you need not stare so," she added, with a forced laugh. "There is

never any knowing whom, or rather what, a woman marries! I know quite a sweet girl who married a pair of chestnut-coloured horses. Well, they were lovely horses, and she married their owner. He was a very presentable young fellow, but if these chestnuts had not turned the scale in his favour, I scarcely think he would have secured the heart of Christabel. The temptation of dashing up to the doors of her friends with these pawing, snorting, and foaming chestnuts was irresistible."

I thought all this talk very wild, and got rather frightened of it, and of Miss Russell. I felt that Mr. Herbert and I were only a pretence for remarks of which the chief interest centred on Mr. Gray and Elizabeth. I wondered how I could get away from this excitable lady, and for once Miss Dunn, who now appeared, was welcome. Miss Dunn was all amiable condolence.

"I am so sorry, Miss Carr," she said, feelingly. "Of course it is a great trouble to you. Such a fine young man, and so angry with you, I remember. So unjust, too. And the

little girl that will not stay with you. It is such a pity! But how she did go on yesterday after you were gone! So jealous of Harry—like a little cat, really. I thought she would have flown at him when he went nigh Mr. Herbert. Do you know, Miss Carr, I think it's a pity you did not try her with sweets. Miss Russell has got such delicious apricot jam. I daresay a little of it would go a great way with Polly. Or a doll. Shall I get you one? I really think a doll with a little girl would be the very thing."

Miss Dunn had delivered me from Miss Russell, I now wondered who would deliver me from Miss Dunn: Miss Russell kindly did so, by the utterance of one word—

- "Don't," she said.
- "Don't?" repeated Miss Dunn, raising her fair eyebrows—"don't what, my dear Miss Russell?"
- "Don't," repeated Miss Russell, raising her hand, and speaking tartly.
- "Don't what?" persisted Miss Dunn, more tartly still.

But Miss Russell had got into an obstinate fit, and was not to be moved out of it.

"Don't," she said, for a third time, and with a shake of her head and a solemn nod which Burleigh would have envied.

"I am in the way, Miss Dunn," I said quickly; and, without waiting for a reply, I left them both.

As I walked away, I overheard Miss Dunn remarking, in a reproachful tone: "I told you so, you know." To which Miss Russell's only reply was a fourth and triumphant "Don't," as enigmatic to me, and probably to Miss Russell herself, as the three that had preceded it.

CHAPTER VIII.

RIEF is a hard one to deal with. He gives short credit and takes high interest. He was sharp and exacting with me. I did my best not to bring too sad a face to Miss Russell's table or drawing-room. I complained to none; I avoided giving rise to condolence; I did not attempt to see Elizabeth alone, but grief was not to be cheated. I had to give him his dues, and my poor little exchequer of endurance and fortitude emptied so fast that at the end of two days I broke down. I was not very ill; but I could not sleep, and I scarcely ate. I got feverish, too; and it was agreed that I had a violent cold, and must keep my room. doctor said so, and I fancied that the little world below was not sorry for it. My guardian

liked no one's trouble; and Miss Russell, who had had bitter troubles of her own, had not invited us to have moping visitors. She liked young people, because they are light-hearted; and though she was sorry for me after a fashion, I could not help thinking that she was vexed with me too for being so dull. As to Elizabeth, she was very kind, and came and sat with me for an hour daily; but she never spoke of James Carr. Comfort came at length, but my comforter, to say the truth, was the one from whom I least expected consolation. I sat one afternoon—the fifth of my confinement—by my open window, and looked down on the garden below. The afternoon was warm and genial, but neither the serenity of the air, nor the beauty of all things, brought any solace to my desolate mood. A darkness spread between me and the face of nature, and discoloured its fairest Life, for a time at least, had lost its loveliness, and looked wan and death-like. Oh! to be at rest—away somewhere—away from this dull pain, and feel no more this worthlessness of God's fairest gift. "No one cares about me,"

I thought drearily. "Oh! if I only could be dead with poor James!—if I only could!" A little tap at the door broke on this gloomy conclusion. When people want to be dead, they want, as a necessary preliminary, to be quiet, so I am afraid that my "come in" was rather a cross one. The door opened slowly, however, and a little red curly head peoped in at me.

"Oh! Polly," I cried, in my joy, "is that you?"

"Yes," answered Polly, looking rather surprised at so strange a question, "of course it is."

"Oh, do come in," I said eagerly.

But Polly's head vanished immediately on this invitation, the door even seemed inclined to close, but for a moment only, and Polly appeared again, propelled, or at least encouraged, I could not help thinking, by some invisible good genius behind.

"Oh, do come in," I entreated, in my most coaxing tones, but not daring to rise from my chair lest I should frighten her away; and then, mindful of Miss Dunn's advice, I exclaimed with sudden cleverness, "I have got such delicious jam!"

Polly, however, on hearing of jam, became mistrustful, and looked behind her, as if inclined for flight. But the same good genius again came to the rescue, for after a brief parley Polly came in, and the door closed behind her. Her greeting was not encouraging.

- "Jane is to fetch me at four o'clock," said Polly, looking me full in the face.
- "Very well," I replied, taking out my watch.

 "It is only three, so sit down here by me, Polly, and let us be friends."
- "I don't like jam," declared Polly, without sitting down.

I was delighted to hear it; for suppose that Miss Russell had objected to my disposing of her jam, what should I have done?

"Never mind the jam," I said encouragingly; "but come here by me, and let us talk—let me see—let us talk of a doll."

Polly, nothing loth now, came forward and took a chair by mine. Was there ever such a doll as that which Polly and I now discussed?

For she was to have black eyes and yellow hair, and a green robe looped up with brown velvet (Polly's choice), and the tallest of tall grey boots with tassels to them, and the tiniest of hats with the most drooping of feathers, and, to crown all, a parasol.

- "And now," said I, thinking the subject exhausted, "let us talk of something else."
- "Don't you think it is four o'clock?" said Polly, by way of a subject.
- "Not yet, Polly. Talk to me about James, Polly dear."

Polly stared at me and was mute; but her brown eyes seemed to grow larger, and her little lips began to quiver. I hastened to exclaim:

- "What colour must the parasol be?"
- "Blue," answered Polly, with a promptness that did credit to the decision of her character.

Blue, with a green dress! Oh! Polly, Polly!

"Blue," I said aloud—" very well. And now, tell me something."

- "Georgy has got loads of books," said Polly.
 - "You mean Mr. Herbert, Polly."
- "Yes, but his name is Georgy," persisted Polly.
- "Then tell him I shall be glad of some books, Polly. Not yet," I added, as Polly jumped up to deliver the message forthwith. "First tell me something else."

Polly pondered awhile, then came out with:

"He's so very angry with you, you know."

I confess I was amazed.

- "Oh! Polly," I exclaimed, "that cannot be! Angry with me!—about what?"
- "I don't know," answered Polly, with cool indifference. "He was angry on Sunday, you know—so!" and Polly frowned and bit her lip, and looked very cross; then she added in a breath: "Don't you think it is four o'clock?"
- "But what could he be angry for?" I cried warmly, without heeding her. "Do you know, Polly?"

Polly raised her eyes to the ceiling, looked at a fly, then came out with:

"S'pose you ask him. Don't you think it is four o'clock?" she added.

Polly was so evidently tired of my company, that all wish to keep her left me. The information she had given me concerning Mr. Herbert's inexplicable anger had also wholly banished that longing for the grave which I had felt an hour before. I was too much vexed to wish to be dead, and indeed had only one thought—to find out the motive of Mr. Herbert's wrath. Remembering how he had looked when I spoke of Elizabeth, I began to fear that I had been more zealous than discreet, and I longed to apologize for and explain my interference. I went downstairs at once, on the chance of finding him below, but the drawing-room was tenanted by no one save Elizabeth, who put down her book in much surprise as she saw Polly and me entering hand-in-hand.

"What, alive again!" she exclaimed, gaily; "truly Polly works wonders!"

But Polly, indifferent to praise, was all

anxiety to be gone; and as she had seen Jane in the hall, lost no time in bidding me adieu.

- "When am I to get her?" were her parting words.
- "'Her' means the doll, I suppose, Polly. I really don't know when she will come—suppose you come and see after to-morrow?"
- "I shall bring Ellinor," said Polly, promptly. I acquiesced, and thus we parted.

Elizabeth looked after her, and shook her head.

- "And so that little monkey has so restored you that you do not seem the same," she said. "Mysterious! She is red-haired, a little selfish pig, who only cares for her doll, and does not care a pin for you. How did she do it, Bessie?"
- "I don't know, Elizabeth. When did you see Mr. Herbert?"
- "He called yesterday—to ask how you were, I believe."

I shook my head.

"No, Elizabeth, he did not call for that; for

it seems that Mr. Herbert is quite angry with me—Polly says so."

"Does she?" exclaimed Elizabeth, raising her eyebrows.

"She does, indeed."

I had sat down on a chair by the door, and looked very disconsolate, I suppose, for Elizabeth laughed at me outright.

"Poor little simple dove!" she said, tossing up her book and catching it again, "what need you care if he is angry or not? I never care when people are angry with me."

A dove is a lovely bird, but it is not always pleasant to be called one; I was very much nettled at the appellation, as thus bestowed upon me by Elizabeth.

- "But I eare," I replied, with some asperity.

 "What right has Mr. Herbert to be angry with
 me?"
 - "None, I fancy."
- "I know why he is angry," I resumed; "it can only be about you. Oh, Elizabeth, do tell me this: has Mr. Herbert any chance?"
 - "You want to make a peace-offering of me,"

she answered, merrily; "thank you, Bessie, but I cannot enlighten you. I really do not know what Mr. Herbert's chance is."

She spoke so good-humouredly that I could not help thinking Mr. Herbert was getting back into favour.

"Don't let your eyes sparkle, Bessie," she said, quickly, "I mean nothing of the kind."

"Yes, you do," I replied, eagerly, "only-"

I had no time to proceed; the folding-window opened, and Miss Russell was wheeled in from the garden, where she had been taking the air, attended by Miss Dunn, and followed by Mr. Herbert and Mr. Gray.

"We have found the very spot," cried Miss Russell, who looked in high glee—"but, goodness gracious! is that Miss Carr? My dear Miss Carr, I am so glad to see you well again! Not that you look very well yet," she added, frankly. "mais cela viendra, as the French say."

Mr. Gray, who, in a quiet way, was the most courteous of men, added his congratulations to Miss Russell's, and at the same time examined me critically, as if to ascertain how far my brief illness had detracted from my value as a picture. Miss Dunn lamented kindly to see me still so pale, and Mr. Herbert looked at me with such gravity, merely acknowledging my presence with a silent bow, that I remembered his anger as reported by Polly, and felt much displeasure rising within me at the thought.

"I am so much obliged to you for sending me Polly," I said, addressing him in my coldest tones.

He brightened suddenly, and answered, with a smile—

- "I hope Polly behaved well?"
- "Oh, so well!" I replied, avoiding to cast a glance in his direction, and looking steadily before me.

My eyes then fell on a tall mirror, and I had the satisfaction of seeing Mr. Herbert in it, standing like one amazed. I had not accustomed him to these grand ways, and they took him by surprise, I daresay.

"Yes, we have found the very spot," resumed Miss Russell, still in high glee; "for you must know, Miss Carr," she added, addressing me, "that I am going to have a fern-show. Will you compete? Mr. Gray has already dubbed Mrs. Henry de Lusignan 'Queen of the Ferns,' so she is sure to carry off all the prizes."

These last words were uttered with considerable asperity. The presence of the man whom she had loved always acted strangely on Miss Russell. She could not forget that this handsome, tranquil gentleman of fifty had been the loadstar of her youth. She was irritable if he looked at another woman; and sarcastic when he paid the slightest attention to herself. No present kindness could atone for past neglect; love was dead, but jealousy was keen and living still. "Queen of the Ferns," repeated Elizabeth, in her most careless tone—"very pretty; but if I send in anything, Miss Russell, it shall be parsley. I think it quite as pretty as any fern, and a great deal more useful."

On hearing this matter-of-fact remark, uttered by the rosiest and most poetic of lips, Mr. Gray did a rare thing for him—he laughed outright; and Miss Russell giggled hysterically, and looked exasperated. I was standing near one of the folding windows, and caught a glimpse of Harry and Watkins playing on the terrace without, and availed myself of the excuse to slip out and join them. I thus exchanged one storm for another, for scarcely had I reached Harry when he burst out into a fit of crying about his ball, which he had just lost. Whilst Watkins went to seek for it, I stooped on the terrace, and, putting my arms round the boy, did my best to coax him into a better humour.

"She did it o' purpose!" gasped Harry, between two sobs—"she did!"

"Did what?" asked Mr. Herbert, who had come out after me. "Your ball, is it? Why, look, here it is," and, picking it up from a corner where it had rolled unseen, he threw it deliberately on the very centre of a large grass plot in front of the house. "There, go and look for it now," he added, in a quick, imperative way, which was always successful with children.

Harry obeyed, without thinking of demur; and whilst through the folding window which had remained ajar I heard Miss Russell's voice high and sharp within, and Elizabeth's light and pleasant, Mr. Herbert, turning to me, said in a grave, low tone—

"You are displeased with me, Miss Carr—may I ask what I have done?"

I felt the blood rushing up to my face; but I scorned to deny.

"Polly tells me that you are angry with me, Mr. Herbert," I said at once; "and angry since last Sunday. I do not ask if it be true, but I simply say this: You know that what I said was well meant—you may disregard it, but I deny your right to any such feeling as anger with regard to me."

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Mr. Herbert looked petrified, but he did not attempt to contradict Polly's declaration. He stood before me silent, and utterly confused; his face was scarlet, and for once his blue eyes had not a frank look. He seemed so thoroughly disconcerted that I wondered if my vexation at being called a dove by Elizabeth had not carried me too far, and rushing into the opposite extreme, with my usual want of discretion, I exclaimed, in a fit of tardy penitence:

"I wish I had held my tongue; but I could not help it. Indeed I have not deserved that you should be angry with me. I have always done my best to serve you, and I will do so still," I added warmly—"indeed I will. And, Mr. Herbert," I continued, lowering my voice confidentially, "do not mind Mr. Gray—I do not think he has a bit of a chance."

I looked at him triumphantly as I said this, but, instead of the joy and gratitude which I expected, Mr. Herbert heard me out with downcast eyes and bent brow, and a slight gnawing of his nether lip, which boded no good. At length he looked up, and said with a forced laugh:

"Polly is a little chatter-box, Miss Carr pray never mind a word she says."

"Then you were not angry on Sunday!" I exclaimed.

In a moment his face was in a flame again. He could not deny, and he would not confess; but he was spared the trouble of doing either by the sudden appearance of Miss Dunn on the threshold of the folding window.

"I am so sorry to interrupt you," she said sweetly; "but you are both wanted within the fern-show, you know."

Thus summoned, we both obeyed; but never had ferns less interest for me than then. What could ail Mr. Herbert that he was so strange and altered? Whilst I was racking my brain to find this out, the fern-show was going through the process of all shows, and was being discussed after the most approved fashion. first I did not deign to pay the least attention to what was going on around me. I was getting angry with Mr. Herbert again, and to get angry with any one is a very engrossing sort of occupation; but when Miss Russell said: "We must have a tent, you know;" when Elizabeth remarked, "We cannot do without a band;" and when Miss Dunn added, in her dulcet tones, "Don't you think, dear Miss Russell, that we shall also require a tent for the refreshments?" I pricked up my ears, and entered into the fern debate with all the zeal and vigour of a young M.P. on his first sitting. I do not remember what I said, nor was it worth

remembering, I daresay, but I know that Elizabeth looked amused, and Miss Russell a little impatient—that Miss Dunn nodded her approbation of every suggestion I made, that Mr. Gray watched me curiously, and that Mr. Herbert said not one word, good or bad, unless when spoken to, but sat with so unusual an expression of gravity on his handsome face, that, when both he and Mr. Gray were gone, Miss Russell exclaimed—

- "I really think Mr. Herbert is getting disagreeable."
- "Do you?" echoed Miss Dunn; and, turning to me, "What do you think, Miss Carr?"
- "I think that the Fern-show will be a delightful affair," I replied.

We all enjoyed the Fern-show save Mr. de Lusignan, who, when he came home to dinner, heard of it with the most freezing indifference; indeed, he sat in his chair the whole evening, with a face of such settled gloom that it struck me, especially as Elizabeth was gay as a lark, and made herself merry in a way that was not habitual to her. Every evening Harry was brought in by Watkins to bid his grandfather good night. This evening the girl brought him in as usual. The boy ran up to Mr. de Lusignan's chair, and looked up in his face, asking, rather imperatively, what he had brought him from "Lunnon."

"What I have brought you from London, Harry!" said Mr. de Lusignan, slowly—"why, nothing, for the excellent reason that I was not in London to-day."

"Go to-morrow," suggested Harry, with a wistful frown.

Mr. de Lusignan did not answer. He looked down moodily in the child's face, and pushed back the hair from his forehead, as if to see him better still.

- "Go to-morrow," persisted Harry.
- "God bless you, my boy!" said Mr. de Lusignan, in a low, gentle voice, which struck us all.
- "Go to-morrow," said Harry again; but Watkins, obeying a sign of my guardian's, took him away.

The child, indeed, looked back as he was

being led to the door; but Mr. de Lusignan's eyes remained fixed on the carpet, and his arms folded across his breast.

CHAPTER IX.

THIS Fern-show, as I learned later, was Elizabeth's doing. She liked excitement under any aspect, and a crowd of people, of whom she knew nothing, and about whom she cared nought, was the very thing for her. For ferns in themselves she felt supreme indifference, and on the morning of the show again informed me that she could not see the superiority of *Trichomanes Speciosum* over parsley.

I know that, being still very unhappy, I ought to have derived no sort of pleasure from a show of any kind; but we are never young in vain, and, I cannot deny it, the show, Polly, who came to see me with Ellinor, and Polly's doll, the getting of which proved as great an undertaking in its way as the Golden Fleece in

the days of the Argonauts—all these, I say, distracted me most effectually, but the show most of all. Saturday was the day appointed, and Friday was dull and gloomy. Great was my joy, therefore, when I woke and saw the sun shining in through my window-blind. I dressed hastily, and ran down to the end of the garden where the tent was to be erected. was already pitched, and stood there before me, the loveliest tent for which ferns ever exchanged forest shade or open sky. It was dazzling white, striped with red; it had red poles and red flags, that fluttered defiantly in the morning sun; and when I saw Miss Russell's yellow chair wheeled towards the spot, with Miss Dunn in attendance, and Elizabeth following slowly, I ran to meet them in great glee.

"Oh! Miss Russell," I cried, in my delight, "how pretty! I do not think there ever was so pretty a tent, do you?"

"I remember one ten times prettier than this twenty years ago," said Miss Russell, with a sigh.

"Prettier! Was it striped with red, Miss Russell?"

"Hope had striped it with every colour of the rainbow," answered Miss Russell, sadly. "Please not to go in," she added, with a little scream, as Elizabeth walked up to the tent, and attempted to enter. "No one is to enter that tent until the show begins."

Elizabeth looked round from the threshold of the tent with the uplifted drapery in her hand, and smiled haughtily at Miss Russell's imperative tone.

"Why, I can see nothing within your tent save a few weeds in flowerpots," she said, rather disdainfully, but she dropped the cloth which she had raised.

"They are my ferns, I suppose," sharply replied Miss Russell. "I know Mr. Gray has sent for his ferns to London, so no wonder if he gets a prize. My ferns are all genuine, and so I expect nothing of the kind."

"Are Mr. Gray's ferns sham ones, then?" inquired Elizabeth, innocently.

"Please not to ask me about ferns," answered

Miss Russell, with great asperity. "Mr. Gray has proclaimed you Queen of the Ferns, so surely you know all about them."

Elizabeth laughed gaily, but did not take up the glove. Miss Dunn kindly put in:

"So like Mr. Gray! He always does say these nice things. Queen of the Ferns! How very pretty!" And she laughed, and seemed much amused.

Elizabeth's blue eyes had a flash in which there was as much surprise as anger at Miss Dunn's audacity. I saw that the three ladies were fast drifting into a quarrel, and as I caught in the distance a glimpse of the refreshment tent—striped white and blue—I quietly slipped away, and walked towards it, slowly at first, more quickly as I got out of sight. But there was nothing to see in this blue tent. It stood in a green nook, within the shadow of tall trees, and had not even the flower-pots with weeds, as Elizabeth disdainfully called them, of which Miss Russell was so jealous. I looked in unforbidden, and after allowing my imagination to revel on the delicacies which were to be spread

there a few hours later, I walked back to that prohibited sanctuary, the fern-tent. Oh! joy of joys, it was unguarded—the ladies were gone. Quick as thought I darted in, and found myself face to face with Mr. Herbert.

I had not exchanged ten words with him since the day on which I had taxed him with being angry with me, and he had not attempted to deny the accusation. He had been remarkably cool with me since then, and he now looked so little pleased at my intrusion that tears of mortification rushed to my eyes.

"Mr. Herbert," I exclaimed, impetuously, "you do not know your friends. Indeed you do not. I do, and have always done my best to serve you, and yet you will be angry with me. I know why," I added, with more frankness than discretion. "It is all on account of Mr. Gray."

"For heaven's sake do not say that," he cried, with something like passion—"do not!"

"But I do not think he has a chance," I exclaimed, eager to comfort him; "indeed I do not, Mr. Herbert."

He looked at me very earnestly; then, in a

most sober tone, he said—" Will you give Mrs. Henry de Lusignan a message from me, Miss Carr?"

"Oh! gladly," I said, with an eagerness to serve him which he acknowledged with a rather cold "Thank you." "What am I to do?" I pursued.

"Simply to tell her this, that I have something to say to her which I cannot write, and that I entreat her to give me the opportunity of exchanging a few words with her in private to-day—not to-morrow—to-day."

His look was so grave, his tone so serious, that I looked at him in mingled doubt and surprise.

- "Will you do that?" he asked.
- "Certainly," I answered. "But is that all?"
- "All on that subject. And now," he added, with a complete change of look and manner, "do advise me about these ferns. I am no exhibitor, and therefore have been appointed by Miss Russell to assign them their respective places. You are no exhibitor, and can surely assist me in this important matter."

"I am afraid Miss Russell would object to me," I replied, not liking to yield at once to temptation.

"Let her object," he answered, with a smile. "Besides, why need she know it?"

Sin enhanced by mystery is irresistible. Besides, Mr. Herbert and I were standing in the centre of a circle of the loveliest ferns-oh! profane Elizabeth, how could you call them weeds?-and I forgot that, if I did not appear at the breakfast-table, discovery was all but certain. With deplorable facility I yielded to this delightful temptation, and was soon deep in my subject. How we revelled in it, Mr. Herbert and I!—and how we both agreed in preferring common ferns-ferns which we had seen together in the cool shades of Fontainebleau—to the rarest specimen of modern fernery. Especially did we exalt our old friend, Lady Fern-ay, even above Trichomanes Speciosum itself, though reared in the gap of Dunloe, and found only in Southern Africa, or the most secret recesses of the lakes of Killarney.

"Lady Fern!" said Mr. Herbert-"the name

alone is charming. And Lady Fern shall be queen whenever I sit on the jury."

The word "queen" recalled "Queen of the Ferns" and Elizabeth, and a matchless opportunity slipping out of my hands unawares, with a start I cried:

"Oh! what a pity! This was the very time for you to speak to Elizabeth. Oh! why did I stay here instead of fetching her?"

"She would not have come," he said quickly.
"Do not go—it is useless—she will not come."

"But I can try," I persisted, turning away. "How vexatious not to have thought of it before!"

"And how vexatious that you will not believe me!" he exclaimed, looking annoyed. "I assure you that Elizabeth will not come."

He seemed so hurt that I paused on the threshold of the tent, and looked round at him in doubt and surprise. His brow was flushed, and though he tried to smile, he was biting his lip in evident vexation. Had Mr. Herbert got a temper after all? I was more surprised than I can tell. I was also a little hurt.

"But, Mr. Herbert," I argued, "I only want to serve you."

"I beg your pardon," he said stiffly.

I bowed, and went away, leaving him to his evident displeasure. "How disagreeable love makes some people!" I thought, as I walked towards the house—"there am I depriving myself of the pleasure of looking at these lovely ferns, in order to oblige Mr. Herbert, and see how he thanks me! He is getting very ill-tempered, that I can tell him."

But if Mr. Herbert was disagreeable, his ladylove, on hearing his message, which I delivered at once, to my great joy, having overtaken her just as she was going in to breakfast, frowned, and looked so distant and haughty that I drew back in some alarm.

"Really, Bessie," she said, "what can you mean by being so absurd?—that I should go and look for Mr. Herbert in the tent——"

"That was my suggestion, not his," I interrupted, much abashed—"all he wants is to speak to you to-day, Elizabeth."

"Then let him if he can," she replied disdain-

fully. "I have got nothing to say to Mr. Herbert, and do not care if the whole world heard what he may have to say to me."

With this she entered the house, leaving me dumbfounded, and so much mortified that I was not tempted to go back and give Mr. Herbert an account of my embassy.

The Fern-show would not have been a real Fernshow, if there had not been a jury and prizes. Miss Russell's eagerness on this subject the whole morning amazed me. It was—"I ought to get a prize, you know;" or, "I must get a prize;" or, "Of course I shall not get a prize. I am quite prepared for it, as mistress of the house. But it is not fair."

Although Miss Russell was prepared for defeat, her ardour for victory was none the less keen. She had herself wheeled about the tent until the hour of the opening, as if she could hope to pierce the canvas and get at her fate, hidden within; and when Mr. Herbert and the other members of the jury left the tent, there was no coaxing Miss Russell did not employ to get at the truth from them. Mr. Herbert was

impenetrable; and whilst he was gaily parrying her attacks, the other members of the jury quietly stole away.

"I see what it is," exclaimed Miss Russell, with considerable asperity, "I have got no prize!" And in her vexation she added sharply, "Wheel me out of the sun, Brown, will you!"

"How much Miss Russell wishes for a prize!" I said to Mr. de Lusignan, by whom I was standing.

He laughed at my simplicity.

"It is all gambling," he said, "all gambling, Mignonne; for if ever there was a gambler, Miss Russell is one."

I opened my eyes wide.

"Oh! but with whom can she gamble?" I exclaimed.

"With the world at large, Bessie. She has partners in London, in Paris, in St. Petersburg, &c., and they are called consols, or three per cents., or five per cents., &c., or shares, or debenture stocks, or all sorts of barbarous things, about which you know nothing. Have you been so long in Miss Rus-

sell's house, and have you not noticed that she is elated or depressed in the morning after post-time, and only gets to be herself in the afternoon? Just now a fern prize does as well as colonial or foreign mines, or telegraph companies, for excitement."

I do not know what more my guardian would have added, if Miss Russell had not now been wheeled back to the tent, spite of the sun.

"I am sure it is two o'clock," she said, "and as the show begins at two, I really will go in before the crowd comes."

"It wants a quarter to two," said Mr. de Lusignan, taking out his watch.

"Your watch is slow," impatiently retorted Miss Russell. "Wheel me in, Brown."

The yellow chair was wheeled into the tent. We followed it, and a scream of delight announced Miss Russell's victory.

"You know, Miss Carr, that I have got a prize!" she exclaimed, looking round at me. "My lady fern has won the day!" And without waiting for my reply, or giving a look to any ferns save her own, she added eagerly,

"Wheel me out, Brown; I see Mrs. Thomas Gray coming."

She was wheeled out at once, and I heard her exulting exclamation of, "I have got a prize, Mrs. Thomas Gray. My lady fern has been proclaimed queen."

"In—deed!" was the slow reply, and Mrs. Thomas Gray entered the tent, escorted by her handsome brother-in-law.

"Very lovely—so delicate," murmured Mr. Gray, as he sauntered round the tent with his critical look; and before he could see me I slipped out.

Polly was to be brought to me at two exactly, and I wanted Polly. I found her in the house, just coming in, and Polly's first words were:

- "Where's the doll?"
- "Not come yet, Polly. And where's Ellinor?"
- "Ellinor's ill. But why didn't the doll come?"
- "I suppose her parasol was not ready. But what is the matter with Ellinor?"

I wanted to talk of Ellinor, as a most con-

venient diversion; but friendship was weak in Polly's tender breast, and she wanted to talk of the doll. I took her to the fern tent; then to the refreshment tent, where I stuffed her; then to listen to the band, but all in vain.

Life has told me many a time since those days that the better half of our joys lies in their anticipation. This Fern-show proved no exception to the rule, so far as I was concerned. The ferns looked lovely in their tent, the refreshments were both choice and abundant, and the band, rare good fortune, as I learned later, was a first-rate band. But somehow or other I did not enjoy myself very much; all through Polly, who worried me so incessantly about her doll that I once caught myself wishing Polly had remained in Australia. I have always been shy of crowds, and this crowd seemed to me a very motley one. I scarcely knew a face in it, and I am bound to say that the faces I did see did not tempt me into a wish for close acquaintanceship.

There was a Miss Raymond, whom I had never seen before, and whom I have never seen since,

but whom I'met incessantly during the Fernshow. I know that she was called Miss Raymond, because I was introduced to her by Miss Dunn, and honoured by her with a most supercilious stare during the ceremony. I have no doubt that she took me for Polly's governess, and was amazed at Miss Dunn's impertinence. I met her first in the fern-tent, and she there made an indelible impression upon me. This young lady, who was even more than usually girlish in appearance—that is to say, who had very light curly hair, very light eyes and eyebrows, very slight features, scarcely any shoulders, and no waist to speak of, and who, to enhance the effect of those youthful attributes, was attired in the most ethereal of garments, duly puffed out and looped up, with the daintiest of little straw hats perched on the top of her little empty, curly head-this young lady, I say, made up for the stinginess with which Dame Nature had dealt out to her the gifts of strength, bodily or mental, by the exercise of unlimited authority over her maternal parent. She called her "darling," indeed, which was

very kind of her, but I can aver that poor "darling," a strong, raw-boned, red-haired woman, was ruled with a rod of iron.

- "Now, darling," playfully remarked Miss Raymond, "are you coming?"
- "But, my dear, I should like to look at these ferns," remonstrated Darling.
- "Now where's the use of looking at ferns?" severely retorted her daughter.
- "But, my dear, we came to look at ferns," argued the mother.
- "Now, darling, I wish you would not go on so," sharply said Miss Raymond, evidently losing patience at this persistent rebellion; "besides, you know, you have seen them."

This last remark sounded, no doubt, like a relaxation of authority, for "darling," brightening up, exclaimed with great alacrity—

- "Indeed, my dear, I have not seen half of them yet."
- "Plenty!—plenty!" impatiently said her daughter; "besides, you know, I can't bear being called 'my dear'—so school-girl—and you will do it!"

Darling bowed her red head under the reproof.

"I can't help it, my dear," she said meekly.

"I used to call you so when you were a little thing, and——"

"Oh! if you will, why, you will!" exclaimed Miss Raymond, with a little sniff of indignation. "I know of old that when you are bent upon a thing, you will do it."

Having uttered this speech, Miss Raymond walked out of the tent, and poor "darling," looking rather frightened, followed her.

I am bound to say that Miss Raymond was not always so cross as she showed herself then, and that this display of temper proceeded partly from the natural exasperation produced on her powerful mind by seeing another young lady with garments more puffed out and skirts more looped up, and a much smaller hat than her own, engaged in a close and apparently most interesting conversation with the intellectual young man who had once given me the story of Joseph's dog.

When, half an hour later, I saw Miss Ray-VOI. III. mond again in the blue and white tent, partaking of refreshments, she was doing so in company with that identical young gentleman, and looked in the highest of spirits and the most charming of tempers; and "darling," unwatched and unreproved, was drinking endless cups of tea in a remote corner.

My head ached with the sun and with Polly, so to get shade, at least, I wandered away to the little lake. No one had found it out yet, and the spot was as green and cool as if it had been buried in a wilderness miles away from the world.

"Now, is not this delightful, Polly?" I said, sitting down on the grass in the shade.

"No," replied Polly, who was very sulky.

But I was getting hard-hearted, and I let Polly sulk away. I looked at the tall reeds which rose from the glassy surface of the lake, at a little islet in one of its bays, that seemed to rest there as if it had come a long journey and was tired; at the water-lilies, so large, so white, so calm on those still waters, and everything spoke to me of freshness and rest in the soothing language of inanimate things.

We had not been long there before I heard Elizabeth's clear voice across the lake, through the trees. Presently I saw her coming out of the green gloom, attended by Mr. Gray on one side, and Mr. Herbert on the other. She was radiantly beautiful, she was also warm, and fanned herself slowly. She saw me at once, and gave me a pleasant nod; then, in the tone of a queen to her subjects, she said—

"I am tired."

In a moment Mr. Gray spied out a rustic seat in the shade, and Elizabeth sat down upon it with a languid air. Mr. Gray sat down by her, but Mr. Herbert remained standing. He leaned his back against the trunk of a tree. I fancied it was to have a better look of her lovely face.

"Do you still paint, Mr. Herbert?" she asked, suddenly; and without waiting for his reply, "I put the question because you look as if you were studying a subject for a picture."

"You are quite right," he answered, bowing his head with a smile—"a beautiful subject."

Elizabeth looked as unconscious as if the lake

were the only beautiful thing within his ken, but Mr. Gray smiled. I do not think he was of a jealous temper at all. I do not think that, if Elizabeth had been his wife, he would have objected to the whole world falling in love with her.

"I thought Mr. Herbert's forte was land-scape-painting," he remarked.

"My forte was nothing," rather drily observed Mr. Herbert; "but when I did draw, I could draw heads, of course."

"What a charming little sketch that was you made of Miss Carr!" said Elizabeth—" so poetical, and yet so life-like!"

The air was very still, and the lake was narrow. I could hear every word they said, I could also see how Mr. Gray's calm eyes fell upon me, as if he wondered that my image could be made poetic, and yet life-like. Mr. Herbert said nothing. Elizabeth continued:

"That was a pleasant time in Fontainebleau, Mr. Herbert."

I saw, or fancied that I saw, the colour deepen on his cheek. I could imagine the light

which came to his eyes as she thus recalled the past. His voice sank as he said—

"It was more than pleasant."

Mr. Gray was not a jealous man, but he was nervous and irritable.

"I detest Fontainebleau," he said, with his most fastidious look. "An endless palace, an endless forest, endless rocks, endless everything!"

"I adored Fontainebleau!" perversely retorted Elizabeth. "I thought it the most delicious place I was ever in. I liked the palace, the forest, the rocks—everything!"

She looked saucily at Mr. Gray, who took this rebuff in submissive silence. I suppose that to see his rival thus slighted gave Mr. Herbert heart, for he said, with a sudden and happy laugh—

"Do you remember Barbison and Ganne's, and his room full of painting?"

"Hideous daubs!" ejaculated Mr. Gray, evidently getting ill-tempered.

I suppose Elizabeth thought she had been long enough gracious to her early lover, and

that she must hold the balance more even between him and the second, for she said, carelessly—

- "I don't remember these paintings enough to speak of them."
- "Not remember them!" exclaimed Mr. Herbert, in genuine surprise.
- "No. Don't you know that I forget places and things when they are out of my sight?" she replied, rising. "I can't help it," she added, addressing Mr. Gray, and looking full in his face, "my interest in those I like best goes when I don't see them."

He laughed, and seemed much amused at her frankness.

- "I thought you said you adored Fontaine-bleau?"
- "Of course I did," she replied, opening her blue eyes, "and so I did adore it then, but you don't suppose I adore it now. Why, I should not care if I never saw it again."

"Then I suppose that to keep your regard one must never be out of your sight?" he said, with some gravity. "Oh! but that would be so tiresome," she objected gaily.

"For you, granted; but think of the temptation you hold out."

I heard no more, for they had re-entered the little grove. Mr. Herbert came round to me.

"They say that women are fickle, Bessie," he said. "Strange error! Such as Elizabeth was the first day I knew her, such she is still!"

I had risen and stood by him, holding little Polly by the hand. I thought he was going to stay with us. But if woman be unchangeable, man is not more mutable. The spell which abided in her flowing garments was no more to be resisted at Hanvil House than at Fontaine-bleau. He stood still awhile looking after her; then, saying something which I did not hear, he left me abruptly, and followed in the track of his divinity. The lake had lost its charm, and I left it, dragged back by Polly to the bewitching precincts of the refreshment tent.

Mr. Herbert's star had risen once more when I saw the three again an hour later. Mr. Gray bore his eclipse very calmly. If he was no longer favoured with Elizabeth's smiles, he could still look at her.

At five the Fern-show closed, the band ceased to play, the refreshment tent was fairly cleared out, and the guests trooped off, all looking as if they had had quite enough of it. Miss Russell, who sat in her yellow chair, attended by Brown only, on the threshold of the Chinese pavilion, looked after her visitors as they departed with a critical eye. Ladies in amazing costumes predominated, but black coats were scarce, and there was only a sprinkling of brown gardeners, with their wives and daughters.

"The Fern-show would not have been a genuine sort of thing without them, my dear," confidentially said Miss Russell aside to me. "They were very pleased to be asked, poor souls! And, entre nous, Miss Carr, they did not eat half as much of the cakes and other things as the young ladies. How they did tuck in, to be sure!"

Miss Russell's asides had this in common with stage ones, that they could be heard afar. I was ready to sink with shame at being thus addressed in a loud and clear tone, especially as Miss Raymond was just then passing by, escorted by the narrator of the never-to-be-forgotten story of Joseph's dog. The broadest of stares was Miss Raymond's only answer to Miss Russell's kind remark upon the appetite of young ladies; and having ignored the lady of the house as much as one mortal creature can ignore another, she passed on.

Luckily for me, "Darling" thought proper to come up to Miss Russell and express her delight at all she had seen and admired; and as the good lady was of an eloquent temper, and did not always know how to finish a sentence, but was apt to flounder inextricably in the very midst of it, I could slip away, and quit the dangerous vicinity of Miss Russell. I had not walked ten steps before I met my guardian. He had been very moody all day, and now looked so gloomy that I could not help feeling uneasy as I watched him. He saw me very well, but walked on without opening his lips. I stood still, in order to avoid meeting him again; and whilst I stood thus Mr. Herbert came up to me.

I was struck at once with the gravity of his aspect.

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"Polly is gone," I said. "Jane came for her half an hour ago. Polly is very cross with me, all about her doll, but I really cannot help it."

Mr. Herbert did not answer one word I said, but still looked at me with the same settled gravity.

- "You gave her my message?" he said.
- "You mean Elizabeth? Yes, I told her at once."
- . "That is why she has avoided being alone with me the whole day. It is hard to see so noble and beautiful a creature bent on her own undoing."

My heart sank at his words.

"Oh, do not go!" I cried; "I will speak to her again—do not go!"

I was turning away—his upraised hand arrested me.

"Do not," he said; "tell her nothing—it is too late. I will be honest—it was too late even this morning. I suspected it; I am sure of it now that I have seen her with Mr. Gray. Yes, it is too late for ever. What I can do I will do, but who can undo what she has been doing all day? I repeat it—it is too late for ever. Good-bye—God bless you!"

He took my hand and pressed it, and left me, rooted to the spot in mingled amazement and dismay. A smart tap on my shoulder soon roused me. I looked round, and saw Elizabeth blooming and gay.

- "I am afraid my fan is a hard one," she said; "but you looked as motionless as Lot's wife. Pray let me hear all the particulars."
- "Particulars of what, Elizabeth?" I asked, slowly.
- "Of Mr. Herbert's invitation to luncheon, of course. What, do you mean to say that you know nothing about it? Impossible."
- "Indeed, Elizabeth, Mr. Herbert never opened his lips about it to me."

She looked at me in evident doubt.

"It must be true, since you say it," she remarked at length. "And so I give you news instead of receiving any. We are all to go and take luncheon at Mr. Herbert's after to-morrow,

and Mrs. Thomas Gray is to do the honours; and it will be odd, will it not, to see Mr. Gray a guest in his own house?"

I answered that it would be odd, but nothing seemed so odd to me as to see Elizabeth so light and gay, and to feel a weight so heavy at my heart for her sake. But little by little that weight passed away. Mr. Herbert was jealous, that was plain, and a jealous man can commit strange mistakes.

CHAPTER X.

THERE are times when our days drop off one by one, slowly and leisurely, eventless and colourless, and of these a woman's life chiefly consists. But there are times, too, when days are so full, so strange, and so dramatic that they comprise the story of years; and of a few such days my life was made up about this time. When I look back upon it now I am amazed to see that so much of moment to myself and to others occurred in so brief a space.

I had greatly wished to see Gray's House, and yet on the morning of our intended visit to it I woke with the heaviest feeling of sorrow I had felt for many a day. It seemed to me as if all the grief I had curbed down since I had learned the death of James Carr were coming

back in its early force. I felt too restless to sleep again, and after awhile I thought I would go down to the garden. I dressed hastily, stole downstairs through the silent house, and let myself out with a sense of relief. The morning was beautiful and calm, the flowers were still bathed in dew, the birds were only beginning to chirrup—everything was fresh and lovely as I passed through the solitary gravel paths. I went on without stopping till I had reached the little lake. I had a fancy for seeing it at that early hour. It was fully gratified. The red sun was climbing above the glassy pool, half veiled by thick mists which floated softly on its surface. A forest of reeds rose straight and tall in the morning stillness. Lilies lay floating on the water, above which the wild fowl screamed loud and shrill in their wheeling flight. had just wakened from their night slumbers, I believe, and looked like so many winged ghosts as I saw them through the white mist. and looked at them, wondering what I should say about them if I were a poet, but always coming back with a sort of despair to the mat-

ter-of-fact conclusion that I should have nothing to say except that they were birds. The truth is, poets can indulge in few flights of fancy now. They were more favoured by their surroundings in the olden time. If Shakespeare had not been a contemporary of the fairies, and caught many a glimpse of them in their green haunts, he could never have told us all sorts of things about them; and as for the Greeks and the Romans, who can doubt that when they went out in the early morning, as the full moon sank behind the hill, and grey dawn was breaking in the sky, they actually met their heathen gods and goddesses trooping home to Olympus. If I had been one of these I dare say I should have met my favourite Diana just then. It would have been worth while seeing the divine huntress, fleet and fair, brushing the morning dew from the grass with her sandalled feet, and passing through the cool landscape with her greyhound by her side, her quiver full of arrows across her back, her unerring bow in her hand, her silver crescent on her brow, and a dead fawn on her shoulder. Very different from the divine lady was the

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vision which now greeted my eyes, as, turning round rather suddenly, I saw Miss Dunn stealing behind the trees. I took fire at the thought of her impertinent watchfulness, and walked straight up to her.

"I am so glad it is you," said Miss Dunn, very coolly; "do you, know, Miss Carr, I got quite frightened when I heard a footstep on the stairs. I really thought I must see who it was. Dear Miss Russell is so nervous about thieves and burglars."

To this plausible explanation I could oppose nothing—Miss Dunn was too much for me, as usual.

"I could not sleep," I answered, a little sulkily.

"Of course not," promptly responded Miss Dunn, as if not to sleep were the natural thing. "How can one sleep? Everything is so exciting! That Fern-show was too much for poor dear Miss Russell, and I feel sure the luncheon at Gray's House this morning will upset her—only what can I do, Miss Carr?"

I longed to tell Miss Dunn that she could go

away and leave me; but civility is full of troublesome hedges and ditches, which it requires a well-trained horse to leap over. My little trotting pony was not equal to the achievement, and all I could do was to let Miss Dunn take the tame creature's bridle, and lead it unresistingly along her own tiresome, wearisome road. It is no figure of a speech to say that she took me straight home. She was so evidently determined not to let me go, that I had no alternative but to walk to the house forthwith, and all the way Miss Dunn purred her common-places into my ear, and wondered at this, or condoled about that, till the beauty fled from the morning, and the very music went away from the song of the birds; and the worst of it all was that I saw Miss Dunn had watched me because she really thought there was something to discover in this early walk of mine.

I was delighted when the house was at length within sight "Now," I thought, "I shall be rid of Miss Dunn." I was wholly mistaken.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, in a tone of genuine surprise; "there's a trunk on the terrace! Who can have arrived? Do you see it, Miss Carr? You are long-sighted, I know. Do tell me what colour it is of!"

"It is a grey trunk," I replied crossly.

"A grey trunk! Who can have a grey trunk? And is not that a carpet bag standing by it? Do tell me what sort of a bag it is, Miss Carr. I think there is a great deal in bags—don't you?"

"No," I answered, exasperated. "I do not."

"Ah, a question of opinion; and what sort of bag is it, pray?"

"Black leather, I believe."

"A black leather bag and a grey trunk! Who can that be? Why, of course, it is your friend Mademoiselle! I remember her leather bag quite well! How delightful! And you see, Miss Carr, there is a great deal in bags, after all!"

I heard the last words from a distance, for on hearing the name Mademoiselle I flew, sprang up the three steps of the terrace, and rushed breathless into the drawing-room, where my guardian had come down to receive his sisterin-law.

"Oh, dear Mademoiselle!" I cried, heedless of his presence. "God bless you for coming! I have been so wretched! I have missed you so! Oh, I am so glad! so glad!"

And clasping my arms more tightly than can have been pleasant about her neck, I sobbed upon her kind shoulder.

"Yes, Mignonne, I know, I know," she said soothingly; "why, you are quite thin and pale!" she added, putting me by to see me better.

"And yet no one can accuse Bessie of not putting the precept of early to rise in practice," drily said Mr. de Lusignan.

His voice sobered me at once. I felt that for some reason or other my presence was an intrusion. I turned from Mademoiselle, with my hand still clasped in hers, and looked at my guardian. His dark face was all severity and gloom, and he sat back in his chair, in an attitude so moody that my heart sank within me. Had I done wrong? Was I guilty of some strange offence? His gaze fastened on the window, and

looking through it at the garden and its flowers and trees, gave mine no answer. I turned back to Mademoiselle. And now for the first time I noticed how worn was her aspect, how heavy and sorrowful was the look of her blue eyes.

"Oh! how delightful!" said Miss Dunn, opportunely coming to the rescue; "but how tired you must be, dear Mademoiselle, and how hungry! You must have your breakfast at once. Had you a rough passage? How charming that you came to-day! We are all going to Gray's House to luncheon. So charming that you did not come to-morrow."

"You are very kind," quietly replied Mademoiselle, "but I feel rather tired; I shall not be able to accompany you anywhere to-day. I hope Miss Russell is quite well."

"Oh! so well, and in such good spirits! It is quite refreshing to think how she does keep her spirits. She will be so delighted, Mademoiselle, at your arrival, and so grieved at your not being able to accompany us to Gray's House!"

Raising his moody head, my guardian now said sarcastically:

"How will she manage the two, Miss Dunn! How will she be both grieved and delighted?"

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"Oh! I'm après l'autre, of course," very coolly answered Miss Dunn, whose blue eyes had a gleam of defiance; "and now I shall give orders for Mademoiselle's breakfast."

She left us, and the door had scarcely closed upon her when my guardian, stamping his foot, exclaimed vehemently:

"What does she mean by calling you Mademoiselle? Have you no name? What does she mean?"

He looked so furious that I stepped back. I felt frightened, and especially amazed, at so much wrath for so slight an offence. Foolish amazement! I might have known that when anger cannot be spoken, it will catch at anything and turn it into a mortal injury. But, as I said, I was almost afraid, and stammering something about not intruding any longer upon them, I left the drawing-room.

I was dressing to go to Gray's House when I saw Mademoiselle again. I thought it was Elizabeth coming in to give me a critical look,

as she often did before dinner, and I said, "Come in," without turning round from the glass before which I was standing. I was trying a rose which she had given me after breakfast, and I said gravely:

"I am not going to wear it, Elizabeth; but I like to see how it looks, you know."

"It looks well, Mignonne," answered the voice of Mademoiselle; "why not wear it?"

I dropped the rose as if pricked to the quick by its thorns, and turned round in some confusion.

"I am in black," I said gravely, "and—and I have no mind for roses."

"Yes, Mignonne, you have had a great trouble, I know. Tell me all about it."

My heart opened at the kind tones of her voice. She had sat down in the one armchair in my room. I drew a little low seat to her knees, and I poured forth all my sorrow to her patient hearing.

"It is so hard," I said to her again and again, "it is so very hard. James Carr was my only relation, and my only friend; and now he is dead, and he never knew how much I loved him! And now I feel so lonely—oh! so lonely, without him."

"Yes, Mignonne, he was the friend of your youth, and you loved him dearly; but, after all, you had not the power to make him happy!"

"But I ought to have had that power!" I exclaimed, in a burst of remorse. "I ought not to have cared about myself. I ought not to have been so selfish, and that is why I feel so wretched."

Mademoiselle looked down at me very thoughtfully.

"Mignonne," she said, putting her hand under my chin, and thus making my face look up to hers, "do you really regret not having married him?"

"Oh!" I cried, rather startled, "how can I regret that? When you know how jealous poor dear James was, and how he worried me!"

She smiled down at me very kindly.

"Poor little Mignonne," she said, "you have a kind heart and a sensitive conscience; but, after all, you are true to yourself, and you do well—you do well, Mignonne. There is nothing like it."

It was a wonderful relief to hear Mademoiselle tell me this. With her clear reason and firm judgment, she was as a second conscience to me. But I wanted to be miserable, after the fashion of the young, for I began a fresh moan.

"If even I had Polly," I lamented; "but she would not stay with me, and she only cares for what I can give her. She was as cross as could be on the day of the Fern-show, because her doll had not come."

Mademoiselle asked, in some surprise, who was Polly; and I told her, lamenting the hard-heartedness of that young maiden, and also rather jealously commenting upon her preference for Mr. Herbert.

"Why does she like him so much, and me not at all?" I argued. "I do not think he cares greatly about her, and I should be so fond of her—if she would only let me!"

"So he went to Australia!" said Mademoiselle, very gravely. "What took him there? He can scarcely have reached the country when

he left it, and came back here to be a great man, and buy Gray's House. That is a change from the poor struggling painter whom we knew at Fontainebleau, Mignonne."

- "He is not much altered, Mademoiselle—I mean, he is just the same, or, rather, he scarcely says a word now. He is very grave and silent."
 - "Then he is not happy?"
- "He does not seem unhappy, Mademoiselle—only silent. He was only cheerful once, and that was at the mill."

Mademoiselle was in the questioning mood, for I had to tell her minutely the story of that day. Purposely I avoided dwelling on the flight of Elizabeth, but I daresay she knew about it already.

- "And so you think he does not care any more about Mrs. Henry de Lusignan?" she said, thoughtfully, as I ended. "The more's the pity—the more's the pity!" And she sighed.
- "Not care about her?" I exclaimed, opening my eyes wide; "why, of course he loves her more than ever."
 - "Then I suppose he comes here often?"

- "Not very often. But, of course, he cannot come as often as he would wish to come."
- "But he is very attentive to Mrs. Henry de Lusignan?"
- "He would be, if it were not for Mr. Gray, and Miss Russell, and Miss Dunn, you know."
- "Mr. Gray? Ah, I daresay Mr. Herbert is jealous and sulky."
- "But he ought not to be jealous," I argued, a little impatiently. "It is not his way to be sulky."
- "Not jealous, Mignonne. And yet, as you say, he loves her more than ever."
- "Of course he does!" I exclaimed, amazed at Mademoiselle's seeming doubt.
 - "Then he has told you so, Mignonne."
- "How could he, Mademoiselle? But though he will not confess it, of course I know it."
- "Ah! very true," she said, smiling kindly.

 "And now, Mignonne, why not put the rose in your hair? I think it would look well."
- "So Elizabeth says," I answered, with a sigh, but that is only because she likes me."

Mademoiselle was silent a while; then she said, slowly and leisurely:

"Mignonne, what I have to say is not pleasant to tell, not pleasant to hear; but there is no shunning it. I wish I could be silent, but I cannot. Do not trust Mrs. Henry de Lusignan too much. I do not say that she would either deceive or betray you, but she does not trust you, and the friend who does not trust is no friend."

I could not bear this, perhaps because I felt it was so true; I started nervously to my feet, and whilst tears rushed to my eyes, I cried—

"I know that Elizabeth loves me—I know she does!"

"She does not trust you," said Mademoiselle, rising; "she trusts no one—she cannot," she added, with a firm, clear look. "And now, Mignonne, I daresay it is time to go. Do not be vexed with me—time will show."

I hung my head abashed, but I could not deny that Mademoiselle's plain speaking had rather displeased me. I am a bad dissembler, and it was well for me that Elizabeth and I did not meet till we entered Miss Russell's carriage, and drove off to Gray's House. Mr.

de Lusignan preferred walking, he said, and he looked so gloomy that he might have added that he preferred not being in our company. Elizabeth was in the lightest of spirits, and neither seemed to miss him nor to perceive that I was silent and depressed; she chatted gaily with Miss Russell, who was very airy, and they both ignored Miss Dunn and her common-places till she took the hint and looked out at the landscape, smiling to herself in rather a peculiar fashion. I have always fancied that Miss Dunn had private intelligence of the doings of the people around her, though neither then nor later could I fathom the means through which she procured it; and I am sure that when Elizabeth and Miss Russell thus put her by, she already knew of the disappointment which awaited them at the end of their journey.

The last time I had seen Gray's House, I had seen it shut up and lonely, a deserted dwelling seeming to sleep its useless life away in a green wilderness. But now its windows were all glancing in the morning sun; some were halfopen, and the muslin curtains within waved to

and fro in the pleasant westerly wind. The noble elms of the avenue that led to the house spread their mighty boughs in quiet majesty, and the lawn beyond them was bathed in golden sunshine, and ended in beds of blushing roses. I remembered James saying to me, "You like roses," and I hung my head to hide the tears that started to my eyes.

Mr. Herbert and Mrs. Thomas Gray came out to receive Miss Russell as she was carried up the steps of Gray's House; and in her pompous style Mrs. Thomas Gray poured forth her welcome and made her lament.

"I am so glad you see Gray's House in perfection, dear Miss Russell," she said; "for the style of Gray's House requires sunshine, and nothing can be more brilliant than this morning," she added, in a tone that seemed to appropriate Gray's House, the sun, and the very breezes. "But, as nothing mortal can be perfect," she continued, in her solemn jesting manner, "Mr. Gray and Mr. Thomas Gray received this morning a telegram which, to their inexpressible despair, called them to town,

without a moment's delay on pressing business. For, of course, you know, my dear madam, that Pressing Business makes it a rule to intrude upon poor Pleasure as much as he can."

Not a whit softened by all this solemn graciousness, not mollified even by the playful allegory with which Mrs. Thomas Gray concluded her speech, Miss Russell looked hard at her, and said, shortly—

"I know that Mr. Gray and Mr. Thomas Gray are both preciously afraid of dying at Gray's House. Wheel me in, Brown." And before Mrs. Thomas Gray had recovered from her amazement, Miss Russell was wheeled past her into the hall, and thence into the dining-room.

Mr. Herbert bit his lip in order not to smile, and Miss Dunn half shut her sleepy eyes, and looked at Elizabeth, who coloured deeply. She felt to the quick the slight to her beauty. How dare Mr. Gray, how dare even Mr. Thomas Gray, voluntarily avoid her presence, and allow any fear to prevail over its charm? Was she not Queen of Hearts by the divinest of all rights?

The luncheon had everything to make it

perfect. It was very good to begin with, and Gray's House was in my eyes at least a delightful place. But the defection of the two brothers spoiled everything, luncheon and all, so far as Miss Russell and Elizabeth were concerned. Miss Russell was abominably cross, and did not care to hide either her ill-humour or its cause. The displeasure of Elizabeth was shown in a languid indifference to everything and to everyone, but especially to Mr. Herbert.

I felt very sorry for him, yet if he had been deaf and blind, he could not have seemed more unconscious than he did of her annoyance or its motive. His manner was very perplexing. It seemed to me as if his eyes could not leave Elizabeth, and yet I could neither speak nor stir but I found him aware of what I said, or watchful of what I did. My guardian too was all vigilance, but had eyes for nothing, and no one save his beautiful daughter-in-law. His watchfulness was so marked that I could not help thinking of a great big tom-cat keeping his eye on a reckless young mouse, and ever ready to stretch out his paw upon her. Spite all these

drawbacks, I enjoyed myself. I did not miss either Mr. Gray or his brother, and the pomposity of Mrs. Thomas Gray, the ill-temper of Miss Russell, the coldness of Elizabeth, and the insipidity of Miss Dunn, could not take away from the charm of Gray's House. It seemed to me as if all the tumult of the great world of cities, as if all the cares of life and all its troubles, must die away ere they reached this favoured dwelling. It was so old, so tranquil, so brown, so harmonious! Surely grief could never wander beneath these majestic trees, or sit down in those rooms, to which passing generations had bequeathed every charm that once adorned them, but had not left one token or one trace of their sorrows! Mrs. Thomas Gray pleaded a little gentle fatigue and remained below, but Miss Russell would be carried up every stair and wheeled through every room, and Mr. Herbert showed her and us about with quiet courtesy and good-humour.

"I daresay you do not know your own house yet, Mr. Herbert!" very impertinently remarked Mr. de Lusignan.

Mr. Herbert smiled, and as usual did not take up the glove; but Miss Russell, delighted to put down my guardian, turned round and said with a stare:

"My goodness, Mr. de Lusignan, don't you know that Mr. Herbert's grandmother was a Gray, and that he was reared in this very house till he was ten years old."

"I was not aware of it," said Mr. de Lusignan drily.

"But how odd that you should not be aware of it!" persisted the pitiless lady; "I thought you were just the man to know everything about everyone." And without giving him time to retort, "Wheel me on, Brown; open that door. What! nothing to see there, do you say, Mr. Herbert? I shall see something, depend upon it."

And there was something to be seen, after all, for this was a painting room, and it was full of paintings. And there was actually one, a half-finished picture, on the easel.

I looked at Mr. Herbert, who reddened and laughed uneasily.

VOL. III.

"Oh! how sweet!" exclaimed Miss Dunn, clasping her hands. "Oh! Mr. Herbert, how clever you are!"

"Well, I declare, Mr. Herbert is a genius!" said Miss Russell, as she looked around her in amazement; "and so many of them too!"

"There's a feather in your cap, Mr. Herbert!" said Elizabeth ironically; "so many of them!"

I do not know if Mr. Herbert heard her. He was still looking at me, with a vexed yet amused look.

"How could you tell me that you had given it up?" I asked, as he came nigh me.

"So I had," he replied deprecatingly; "and indeed I do not intend——"

"All very fine," here remarked Miss Russell, "but I am no judge of paintings. Wheel me out, Brown."

"And I don't care about them," said Elizabeth, laughing, and looking mischievous.

I longed to linger and look at some of my old friends whom I recognized there—the Charlemagne, the Pharamond, the Fountain of the Sanguinede, but Mr. Herbert seemed no more inclined to display his paintings than his guests to see them, and we were out of the room and the door was closed upon us before I could utter one word of remonstrance.

- "You shall see them another time, if you like," said Mr. Herbert to me, as he read the disappointment in my face.
- "What!" sharply exclaimed my guardian, turning round; but Mr. Herbert, nothing daunted, quietly repeated:
- "Miss Carr shall see them another time, if she likes it."

Mr. de Lusignan walked on without adding another word. I could read in his dark face that nothing pleased him which he saw, whilst I was charmed with everything and every room, from that with wainscot of brown oak, in which we took our luncheon, to the distant library with Gothic windows, one of which opened almost above the little river, and showed me, at the end of a green arch of trees, the black wheel of the old mill, and a sheet of water rolling under in white foam.

- "Very pretty," said Miss Russell, "but damp."
- "Yes, but so sweet!" murmured Miss Dunn.
- "Damp!" persisted Miss Russell. "Wheel me out, Brown."

Elizabeth was standing in one of the windows, and thence looking down at the tranquil water below.

- "This is the room I like best," I whispered, stealing behind her; "how do you like it?"
- "Oh, so much! One could take such a good dip in that river when one was tired," she answered coolly, and walked away.
 - "Tired of what?" I asked, following her.
- "Of life," promptly said Mr. de Lusignan, without giving her time to answer. "Don't you know, Bessie, that life is a constant cheat, and that one cannot help getting tired of it now and then."

Elizabeth had reached the threshold of the open door. She paused and looked round at her father-in-law, giving him a look of supreme amazement and disdain; then walked on. Mr. de Lusignan gnawed his lip and followed her. I stood petrified, and remained alone with Mr. Herbert.

- "Oh, Mr. Herbert!" I exclaimed, "is it not dreadful?"
- "Where is the help for it now?" he asked composedly. "And so this is the room you like best. Why so?"

I had no time to answer. My guardian was calling me rather sharply, and I obeyed at once. We had seen everything, and now went out to look at the roses that grew in rare luxuriance and beauty around the house. Even as she went down the steps, Elizabeth, with sudden and irresistible despotism, took possession of Mr. Herbert. Never had she been more gracious, more amiable, and especially more lovely; and at once, and spite his cool declaration, uttered to me a few minutes back, he was in her toils. In vain Mr. de Lusignan looked black—neither heeded him. I gazed at them both amazed; then quietly stole away, and, turning round the house, went on to the mill.

I walked by the little river in the shade of the tall old trees that grew on either of its banks, and whose boughs, meeting high above it, kept it in perpetual gloom and freshness. On the other side of the stream spread a wide and lovely pasture, in which a milk-white cow, and a black one, glossy as ebony, stood knee-deep, looking at me with their full dark eyes. The little river flowed with a gentle murmur at my feet, with here and there a gleam of sunshine piercing the green gloom of its cool waters. I stood looking and listening and wondering at Elizabeth's gloomy fancy. "Oh, I was not tired of life yet—oh, no!"

This thought led me on to another, and instead of going on to the mill, I stood and mused till a sound of steps roused me. I turned round and was filled with dismay as I saw Polly standing behind me with her maid. I had inquired after Polly, and been much pleased to learn that she had gone to spend the day with Ellinor, who was now a resident of Hanvil. By what unfortunate chance had Polly returned? Before I could recover from the guilty confusion into which her sudden appearance had thrown me, Polly accosted me with an inquiring "Well?" more imperative than polite.

"Well, Polly," I replied, as cheerfully and as

airily as I could, "that tiresome doll has not come yet. Very provoking—is it not? How is Ellinor?" I asked, policy suggesting the theme as one likely to soothe Polly.

- "Ellinor is at school," answered Polly, very crossly. "Will she come to-morrow?" she continued without transition.
 - "You don't mean Ellinor, Polly, do you?"
 - "Of course I don't."
- "Oh! the doll then! Well, Polly, I wish I could say that I shall have her to-morrow, but I fear not—on my word, Polly, I have done my best."

Polly looked straight before her and walked on a few steps; I walked humbly enough by her side; then Polly, standing suddenly still in front of me, said very deliberately:

"I don't believe she is coming—I don't believe she will ever come at all!" added Polly, rising in her indignation at my duplicity to the strongest negative she could express in speech.

I was the more confounded at this attack that it was overheard by the whole party, now coming towards us after visiting the mill, Miss Russell and Miss Dunn foremost; Elizabeth and Mr. Herbert lingering behind; and my guardian keeping aloof, but watching all like an evil spirit.

"What is it you don't believe, darling?" sweetly asked Miss Dunn, hastening to come forward.

"She is always telling me such stories about my doll," exclaimed Polly, with an indignant sob, "and I know she has not got it—I know she has not!" cried Polly, getting red in the face.

Miss Dunn burst into a peal of musical laughter, and I was childish enough to feel tears of mortification rising to my eyes. Mr. Herbert, though he only now joined us, seemed to know by intuition all that had been said.

"Nonsense, Polly," he remarked, with careless good-humour; "why, your doll is waiting for you in a box at home. Run off and look at her; be quick, I say!"

If Polly was amazed at this conclusion, so was I. I looked at Mr. Herbert, and thanked him with that silent look, and no more was said about Polly or her doll.

- "And now that we have eaten Mr. Herbert's luncheon, and seen his house and his mill, I suppose we may be off with ourselves," remarked Miss Russell.
- "Is not there a farm somewhere or other?" asked Elizabeth, opening her eyes and looking round her, as if she expected to find the said farm starting into existence at her bidding.
- "Oh! Mr. Herbert does not want to show us his farm to-day," coolly responded Miss Russell; "wheel me on, Brown."
- "But I must see the farm," cried Elizabeth, with pretty despotism; "which way is it, Mr. Herbert?"
- "Mr. Herbert need not take so much trouble," very coolly said my guardian; "we are all going home with Miss Russell."

The blue eyes of Elizabeth had a flash, but it died away into gentle languor.

"Well, I think I am tired," she said with a little sigh, "so the farm must wait."

She turned to Mr. Herbert with her kindest look, as much as to say:

"Igo, because I cannot help myself, you know!"

And her whole aspect was so frankly kind that my guardian looked, as he no doubt felt, very sour, and he gave me proof of his feelings before the day was ended.

- "What a house that Gray's House is!" suddenly said Miss Russell at dinner that evening.
- "Oh! perfect, is it not?" I cried with sudden ardour, and speaking so vehemently that every eye was turned to my end of the table.
- "Perfect!" she echoed; "damp, damp, feverish! No wonder all the Grays died there."

I do not know whether Elizabeth spoke her real feelings, or only wished to contradict Miss Russell, when she said with a smile:

- "It is a house to live and die in, Miss Russell!"
- "And yet I am afraid you will never see it again, Elizabeth," drily said Mr. de Lusignan.

There was a dead silence. His daughter-inlaw paused in the act of raising her glass to her lips, and looked at him fixedly, and that was all.

When dinner was over I went out into the garden. Elizabeth soon followed me.

"You heard him," she said in a low tone, as she took my arm and pressed it. "You heard him! Well, then, I will do anything—I will marry Mr. Herbert before I bear any longer with this yoke."

Her eyes sparkled through her tears, her lips quivered, her cheeks were flushed with emotion. I was going to speak, but she left me without giving me time to answer, as she saw Mademoiselle coming towards us. Mademoiselle too had something to say.

"Mignonne," she said, with a wistful look, "I have often told you so—you are too open. You must be more careful; your guardian bids me tell you so. You mean no harm, but you must be more careful."

The utter confusion with which I heard this speech evidently confirmed Mademoiselle in any conviction of my guilt she had already entertained, for she smiled and sighed as she added:

- "And are you comforted so soon, Mignonne?"
- "What!" I cried, amazed.
- "Are you comforted so soon?" she repeated.
- "You see, Mignonne, I don't think so, but your

guardian is convinced it is all Gray's House, and you know that he will not hear of anything of the kind whilst you are under his care."

My grief, my indignation, as her meaning thus dawned upon me, were inexpressible. At first I could not speak.

"Oh! is it possible!" I cried, at length—"is it possible, and do you think that of me, Mademoiselle?"

My et tu Brute did not seem to produce much effect upon her.

- "Mignonne," she said, calmly, "I think nothing. Only your guardian thinks that Mr. Herbert is very attentive to you; and you know, Mignonne, he always was."
- "Attentive to me!" I began; and then I checked myself, feeling how imprudent was such vehement and emphatic denial.
 - "Is he not, then?" she asked.
- "Oh! yes, yes, very attentive," I said, with suspicious eagerness; "but, you know, he does not care about me."
 - "Not at all, Mignonne?"
 - "No," I answered, unhesitatingly, "not at all."

She gave me a perplexed look, but my eyes could meet hers quite firmly, and it was quite triumphantly that I repeated—

"He does not care for me at all. He never cared for me less than he does now."

CHAPTER XI.

TATHEN I went up to my room that night, the first thing I did was, like the girl in the Scotch ballad, to sit me down and cry. do not think that even then I was unusually given to tears, but some of the things that had taken place that day were too much for my fortitude. To be taxed with liking Gray's House—to be told that Mr. Herbert was attentive to me, when no one knew better than I did that all his thoughts were centred on Elizabeth, was hard; but the hardest of all, as I felt in my inmost heart and conscience, was the loneliness which, swift as night after a long bright day, was stealing over me. Elizabeth would marry Mr. Herbert; she had said so, and what she had said would come to pass. Could I doubt after

what I had seen, and spite of what I had heard, that if she wished it he would be once more at her feet, her servant and her slave, and-and where should I be then? Not with themnever with them. Elizabeth was not altered. She liked me, she had watched faithfully by my sick-bed, but though I could not think her liking for Mr. Herbert very strong or deep, I knew she would tolerate nothing and no one between herself and her husband. I was not old and not wise enough to feel that she was right, and that in love and in marriage it must be so. I only felt the hardship of my lot, the bitterness of losing my two friends at one blow. No fond worship on my part would give me the confidence of Elizabeth, or allow me a share, though small, in the liking of the man she married. Already their love had cost me the love of James Carr, and after having caused between him and me a parting which Death had sealed and now made eternal, it would leave me for ever desolate. I was too proud to forget the past, and Elizabeth's jealous mistrust of me; and remembering this, I knew my fate.

found it hard. I had done all I could, little though that was, to win back the liking of his wayward mistress to Mr. Herbert; but perhaps I had been so zealous because I had not thought success so easy. Had I been sure of it, I would have done no less, for I liked him in my heart, and had always felt that his liking for me was both tender and sincere; but then it was very hard to give up that liking once more, to give up Elizabeth, and to remain alone with the memory of James Carr dying alienated, and far away. Mademoiselle was very good and kind, but there was a great gap of years for ever yawning between us—a gap which, do what we would, neither of us could fill up.

If I had only been of a magnanimous turn, I could have found some comfort in all this; for, after all, I was the victim. If I suffered, it was because others were blest; if I was lonely, it was that my two friends might enjoy the sweetest of companionship. But I was not magnanimous at all. I was glad for them, but bitterly sorry for myself—bitterly sorry never to see their two kind faces again—bitterly sorry for Polly, spite

her ingratitude, and for Gray's House, which I—oh, mortification unspeakable, had actually been accused of coveting! Was it wonderful, then, that I sat down and cried, having such thoughts—nay, that I cried myself to sleep?

For, after all, I slept. Oh! glorious and divine privilege of youth, that cannot be wakeful, which no care, no sorrow, can divorce from that sweet bedfellow sleep! And I slept soundly, too, all the more soundly for my tears, until a sunbeam, stealing through my window blind, fell on my lids and woke me.

That day, which was to be an eventful one in my life and in that of others, began very tamely. Elizabeth looked tired and dull; Miss Russell had a headache, and kept her room; Mr. de Lusignan went out early, and Mademoiselle had letters to write. I wanted to lure Elizabeth out, but she yawned, looked at the sky, said it would rain, and declined. The sun which had wakened me was indeed early overcast by heavy clouds, and the aspect of the day soon grew sullen and threatening. Still I teazed Elizabeth to come out into the garden with me—the truth

was, I wished to speak to her without fear of interruption; but there again I failed-either Elizabeth guessed my wish, and had no fancy to gratify it, or she was really disinclined for a walk, for she gave me a flat denial, and suddenly remembering that she, too, had letters to write, she retired to her room, as to a citadel which I could not invade. I made no attempt to do so-I was rather disheartened at the decided rebuff my overtures had got, and sat in my room alone for the best part of the morning, reading, or rather trying to read. At length I could bear this no longer, and, spite the cloudy greyness of the sky, I went out. I did not venture on a walk in the country-my guardian having rather curtly informed me that solitary promenades were not to his fancy; but Miss Russell's garden, orchard, and grounds being free to me, I went to the lake, as to the loveliest haunt her demesnes could afford. I sat down on the grass and tried to think; but thought would not come. The sadness of the day and the sadness of my own heart were too much for me. This grey day, sunless

and chill, had a look of Autumn, and seemed one of her early harbingers. It was as if Autumn were coming, not as she comes sometimes, with golden sunshine round her head, and mellow fruit in her lap, but as she appears too often to us northerners, with aspect sad and wild, with grey clouds sweeping along a stormy sky, and chill breezes whistling through rustling boughs, and swallows and wild geese preparing to wing their flight to warmer climes. "Ah! if I too could only go away," I thought; "go somewhere and leave trouble behind me as the swallows leave falling leaves, and weeping skies, and sodden earth! If I only could!"

Mr. Herbert's quick step made me start to my feet, for, even without looking round, I knew it was he who was coming. What had brought him, and especially what had brought him here? He carried a sketch-book in his hand. Had he come to draw the little lake? It seemed likely, yet when he walked straight up to me, he gave me no immediate explanation of his presence in this spot. It was only after the usual greetings that he said:

"Mrs. Henry de Lusignan has changed her mind, I fear."

I had presence of mind enough not to seem ignorant of his meaning, but to answer that I feared so.

- "It is a lady's privilege," he said, smiling, "and one to which man must submit."
- "And yet you are disappointed," I remarked, looking at him attentively.
 - "Yes," he answered quietly, "I am."

He was patient as usual, but I knew that he suffered. My heart beat. I felt as if his happiness lay in my hand, and I had but to open it to make him blest—at last.

"A woman has many minds," I said, slowly and deliberately; "and some rise uppermost, and others, often the truest, lie deep."

I spoke so that every word I uttered had a meaning. He gave me a quick sharp look of sudden surprise, but was silent.

"And what one mind dislikes to-day, the other mind may prize to-morrow," I continued.

Mr. Herbert coloured up to the roots of his hair.

"You have a meaning," he said plainly, "what is it?"

I was rather frightened at his direct questioning.

"If I have a meaning, as you say," I replied, a little troubled, "you must guess it."

The colour faded away rapidly from his face. He stood by my side, looking down on the earth and gnawing his nether lip, like one perplexed and at fault; at length he looked up and said:

"Yesterday I asked, I entreated Elizabeth to meet me here and listen to me. She let me hope that she would come; but though I have been here twice already, she is not coming, and she will not come. There is a secret and a danger in her life, and such is her misfortune that I who know both can only utter vague words of warning, which she disregards. She will mind nothing, not even Mr. de Lusignan's dark face, and so she rushes on to her fate, and I, her friend. must see her undoing. It is hard, very hard, but I am powerless. I told you once that the thread of water which flowed between

Elizabeth and me had become a river and was widening into a sea, but a river can be forded, a sea can be crossed, and now—now," he added with evident emotion, "we are as two travellers who have met once, and neither of whom can turn back. Every step we take parts us more and more. I can still catch a glimpse of her when I stand and look behind me, but already she is very far away, and the time is coming fast when, look as long and as hard as I can, I shall see her no more."

Tears rushed to my eyes at so unexpected a conclusion.

"Oh! Mr. Herbert!" I exclaimed, and it was all I could say.

"It seems hard, but it must be so," he said; "and I believe, Miss Carr, that life is made up of such things."

His "Miss Carr," uttered rather coldly, recalled me to myself.

"I beg your pardon," I said awkwardly, "I am afraid you must think me a very meddle-some person. I shall offend so no more."

His silence and downcast eyes seemed both to

confirm the fact that Mr. Herbert did think me a very meddlesome person, and yet when he looked up there was nothing unkind in his eyes.

"I may as well speak plainly once for all," he said deliberately; "for unless I do so, you will never understand. Circumstances parted us in Fontainebleau; and now the reason for which she and I must follow different paths, is that she never cared for me, and that, if I liked her once, there is another woman now whom I like ten times more than ever I liked her."

I heard him amazed, and then, as his meaning flashed across my mind, I stepped back in sudden grief and fear.

"Oh! do not say that," I cried, "do not, never say that again—never!"

He bit his lip, and did not answer at once.

"I knew it would be so," he replied, in a low, vexed tone. "There seems a perversity in such things. Poor James Carr loved you dearly, and you were afraid of him, and did not care for him till he died; and then—then it was exasperating," he added, with a sudden flush, "to see how you grieved for him."

- "Why should I not grieve?" I asked.
- "But there is a way of grieving," he answered quickly; "and you have grieved as if your heart were in his grave."

I did not answer; he continued-

"When Elizabeth was the apple of my eye, you were very kind to me; but since I have given her up and done my best to win your liking, you have grown so cold that, though I speak at last, I do so knowing that I shall amaze and alarm you. What am I to do?" he added, a little angrily; "I can only like a woman, show her that I like her, and if she will not understand me, tell her so at last."

"But you must not like me," I exclaimed, with a sort of anguish—"that's just it. You must never like me, Mr. Herbert. I am the friend of Elizabeth; I am the last of all women who must rob her of your liking. She has had faith in me——"

"No!" he sharply interrupted; "never!—neither in you nor in me, Miss Carr. She was jealous of you—as jealous," he added, correct-

ing himself, "as a woman can be without love; for, you know, she never cared for me."

Alas! I did not know that at all, but I could not betray her to him—it was impossible. I felt the most miserable being alive, and I suppose he saw it, for he sighed and said,

"I must not persecute you; and yet—I do not give you up. We could be so happy—believe me, we could be so happy together."

What was there in the words that gave them an eloquence so sudden and so irresistible that I felt beside myself! His voice and his looks were very persuasive. I shook like a leaf in a strong wind, tears rushed to my eyes, and, with a sense of my weakness, I put my hands before me to put him, his love, and the dangerous flattery of his wooing away, as far as I could, away from me.

- "Do not," I said—"do not."
- "Why not?" he asked, eagerly—"why should we not be happy together?"

Surely there is witchcraft in the simplest words of love—surely there is honey on the tongue of the man who loves, or I should not have felt myself growing very weak—so weak that in my anguish and despair I cried,

"Do not tempt me!—be generous. I do not like you, indeed I do not, but I am very lonely, and I often feel too miserable. Do not tempt me, lest I should forget my honour and my faith."

"You ask me to be generous," he replied, with some passion; "what man can or will be so, when the thing he is asked to give up is the creature he loves best? I am not generous; I will not be so; but I will not tempt you, as you call it, for I could not bear to get you because you feel, as you say, so lonely. I could not bear that you should come to me as to a refuge," he added, his lip quivering as he spoke -"a man to be endured for the sake of his roof, to be detested by fits when it is no longer needed, or despised all day long for his meanness in selling that roof so dear! On those terms I will never have you-never-never! But can I not have you otherwise?" he added, with sudden gentleness. "You speak of honour and faith—what barriers have they placed between

us? And if you cared for me half as much as you care little, why should honour and faith divide us?"

"Oh, how can you ask it?" I cried in my turn, roused to something like passion. "Do you not know that in Fontainebleau the thing you would have me do was imputed to me as a treason and a sin? Elizabeth did not care for you—granted, but still she held it falsehood in me to seek, as she thought, for your regard; and if I robbed, or seemed to rob her of it now, would not she—would not the world think so still?"

"No," he answered, without a second's hesitation, and so coolly that I was confounded. "We will not argue that point," he resumed; "I daresay I could not convince you, but what I could not do, time will. Only remember this: What is true of me is as true of you—Elizabeth and you have met, and are already going each on her different road, to meet no more. Remember it, Bessie," he added, with compassionate tenderness; "never again will you two be as you have been, and the last hour, which has

long ago come for me, will soon come for you."

I heard him with the keenest grief, for I felt in my heart that he spoke the truth, and that the fate he laid before me was already being accomplished. A great pang seized me, and with it a sense of such utter desolation that I hid my face in my hands, and, turning my head away, I cried bitterly. Mr. Herbert made no attempt to soothe the sorrow he had wakened. He uttered not a word, but stood silently by my side, and when, checking my tears, I turned back to him, I found him looking at me—rather sadly, it is true, but very gravely.

"Why do you tell me these things?" I cried, almost angrily; "do you think I shall like you any better because you show me that I have, and must have, nothing left?—that my friend, she whom I loved and still love so dearly, does not care for me?"

"I never meant that," he said quickly; "God forbid! How could so warm-hearted and generous a creature as Elizabeth not love you! But, Miss Carr, friendship is like love—however true, however warm it may be, there are inexorable

laws of life that forbid it between some. depend upon it, no one knows that better than Elizabeth herself. What man can accuse her of having sought his love? What woman can tax her with having tried to win her friendship? What came to her she received as a queen may receive the homage of her subjects, but did she ever offer anything in return? You have no more her confidence than I had, and yet you surely have every gift which could win her, if she was to be won. You are unselfish and devoted, and you forget yourself in her presence as naturally as a daisy in the grass might forget itself in the presence of a garden rose. You give all, and you ask for nothing in return; and you do well, for Elizabeth has it not to give."

"And yet you say she is warm-hearted," I exclaimed, very indignantly.

He was silent a while.

"She had once much to give," he answered after a pause; "but some women can give but once, and to one only, just as there are flowers that open but for the day, and then only to the sun."

"I cannot bear this!" I said impetuously, "I cannot bear it!"

I turned away; he understood me, and let me go. He bowed as I passed by him, but stood still. And so I went on swiftly, with tears in my eyes, and walking as fast as if, with every step, my feet were leaving this new trouble behind them.

CHAPTER XII.

BEFORE I had walked ten minutes I stood still—I could not go further—I did not look round, I felt sure he was not following me, and he could not see me where I was. I slipped down on the grass, and clasping my hands around my knees, I bowed my head upon my lap.

Let us ever pity them who are tempted, for the fight is a hard one, and the world, who sees and is so prompt to censure the fall, rarely sees the struggle, and can never reckon the full cost of victory. One of the keenest temptations which my youth had known was clinging to me then with the grasp of a falcon on its prey. I could not help it; with my whole soul, with my whole heart and being, I longed to say

"yes" to the thing Mr. Herbert had put within my yea and nay; no involuntary impulse made me turn to him with irresistible longing, but I pined to give myself up to him, and to be for ever at rest in his keeping. It seemed to me as if the death of James Carr, as if the inevitable abandonment of Elizabeth, could be not forgotten, but buried silently in the depths of that new life. Ah! he had said it truly—we could be so happy together! My heart leaped at the picture these words called up—a life of calm love and tranquil delights. I saw it spreading far away into the greyness of age, a lovely golden sea, on which the sun ever shone, with waves that should never be roused to wrath by storms of jealous passion! And what stood between me and all this? Elizabeth, who did not love, who had never loved Mr. Herbert, and whom Surely I was Mr. Herbert loved no longer. free to stretch out my hand and have it; surely there was neither shame, nor sin, nor dishonour in taking that which was not hers? Mr. Herbert had been by me then, and could have read my heart, how easy would have been

his triumph over all my denials!—how faint a "nay" would have answered his entreaties! But I was alone, and might be weak with utter impunity; I was alone, and might regret having been so generous and so strong as to deny myself for one who would neither know of nor care for my denial. Shame at my useless weakness overtook me. Where was the use of yielding, when there was no one to press me into consent? I rose, thrusting back every tempting regret, and walked on, arguing away those fond fancies which were insidiously stealing all strength, all nobleness from me. In the name of womanly honour, in the name of trusting friendship, I bade them begone, and haunt me no more! I was calm again when I reached the house. On the terrace I met Miss Dunn.

"I am so glad to find you," she said, with a sigh of relief. "Dear Miss Russell's head is distracted, and Mr. de Lusignan has sent out three times for you. I was going for you myself; but I am so glad to meet you, dear Miss Russell cannot bear me to be out of her sight, you know."

I asked, rather faintly, where my guardian I had a terrible fear that he had gained some unaccountable knowledge of my interview with Mr. Herbert, and was going to call me to Miss Dunn's answer, that he was an account. in the drawing-room with Mademoiselle, rather comforted me—no great harm could befall me if she was there; and yet, when leaving Miss Dunn, who looked at me very curiously, I entered the drawing-room, my heart beat. My guardian had been so moody of late that it seemed as if I might expect anything from him, and I paused at the door, as hesitatingly as any culprit facing the judge. He was standing by the chimney, with an open letter in his hand.

- "Where is Elizabeth?" he said, impetuously, and taking two steps towards me as he spoke. I shrank back, rather afraid.
- "I don't know," I answered. "When she left me this morning she was going to her room to write letters."
- "She never wrote a line!" he exclaimed, with the same impetuosity of tone and hearing. "She went out. With my own eyes I saw her. Where is she now?"

"Indeed, sir, I do not know."

I spoke faintly, and still kept nigh the door.

Mademoiselle, who sat nigh the farthest window, now interfered.

"You frighten Mignonne," she said, beckoning me to her, and kindly taking my hand. "My dear," she added, looking me in the face, "all this has long been coming on, and further concealment is useless. We have every reason to fear that Mrs. Henry de Lusignan—since I must still call her so—has deceived us; that she is not my nephew's widow, that she never was his wife, that her child is not his child, and Mr. de Lusignan's grandson."

She spoke calmly, but very positively, and I stood dumb before her.

"I have suspected this all along," resumed Mademoiselle, "but our own wishes are great deluders. This falsehood was so pleasant to believe in, that both your guardian and I opened our hearts to it; and then there was the child," she added, her voice breaking down, "the child so strangely like him! And now it is over, and mother and child are strangers to

our blood—aliens, with whom we have nothing in common, save the memory of a cruel wrong!"

"But it cannot be!" I cried, in a sort of despair. "Elizabeth must be his widow; and if she is not, who, then, is she?"

Mademoiselle shook her head.

"Whoever she may be," she said, "she is not, I fear, the girl whom my nephew married. I have been to the church in which their marriage took place, I have seen the parish register, and I have read there the name of Louisa Jones, written in characters weak, small, and tremulous. The same hand never wrote that name and the direction on Mr. de Lusignan's card which first set us all astray."

I sat down; spite what Mr. Herbert had told me that morning, the blow stunned me; but after a while I rallied.

"But where, then, is your nephew's wife, Mademoiselle? Surely she would not let another woman take her place? It cannot be."

"She may be dead," answered Mademoiselle; "indeed, I feel convinced she is. But, living or dead, she and Elizabeth are not one."

- "Then who is Elizabeth?" I cried, in a sort of despair—"who is she?"
- "We mean to ask her; we scarcely hope she will tell us. All we do know is what she is not."

Again I said:

"It cannot be. She could not be such a deceiver."

Mademoiselle shook her head and sighed.

"I did not see the clergyman who married my nephew, when I looked over the parish register," she said, "for he had left the parish, and no one could tell me whither he was gone; but we have discovered him at last, and his answer to Mr. de Lusignan's inquiries came half an hour ago. This clergyman, Mignonne, remembers distinctly the marriage of my nephew; he remembers the year, the time of the year, the singular name of the bridegroom, his appearance, which he describes accurately, and that of the bride—a young girl, with blue eyes and flaxen hair. Do you think she was Elizabeth?"

"But he can be mistaken," I said, with a sort of despair. "He must have been marrying so many people about that time, he may have taken one girl for another."

"Then let her tell us so," said Mademoiselle, in a low, sad voice; for, even as she spoke, the folding-window opened, and Elizabeth, unconscious of the storm that had been brooding so long, entered the room smiling, and with the loveliest bouquet of hot-house flowers in her hand. There was no need to ask where they came from, for Mr. Gray, calm, elegant, and handsome as ever, followed her in. Leaving him to his greetings, Elizabeth sank in an arm-chair, looking carelessly happy.

"It is such a trying day!" she said, leaning back. "Are these orchids, Mr. Gray? No? What are they, then?"

She looked at the flowers, now lying in her lap, the rarest, the costliest which money could buy, as a young Goddess Flora might look at a bunch of weeds, the humble offering of some rural swain laid upon her altar. I have read somewhere that we rule our own destiny, it was so for Elizabeth; I have seen it again and again in her case, I saw it then.

On seeing Mr. Gray, my guardian had thrust the clergyman's fatal letter into his pocket, and knit his dark brows with vexation at vengeance deferred; but, on seeing Elizabeth thus calm, thus triumphant, coming in with Mr. Gray in her train, and so carelessly displaying her victory over him, all his pent-up wrath broke forth. He was a man of strong passions and little self-restraint, and without heeding Mademoiselle's alarmed and appealing look, he brought forth the letter again, and looked at Elizabeth with implacable resentment in his dark eyes.

"Madam," he said, in a grave, low tone, as if he had been as calm as he was wrathful, "I will not do you the wrong of delaying one moment the question I have to put. I have accertained beyond reasonable doubt, and that on the testimony of the clergyman by whom my late son was married, that you are not the person whom I took you for, whom I brought to my house and introduced to my friends as my lost son's widow. I cannot in honour allow anyone to labour any longer under this mistake, and

though I do not doubt that you can give the best account of yourself, you will not wonder, I am sure, if I put you under the necessity to do so."

I have often wondered at the needless cruelty of this speech, coming from one who was not cruel; but he was exasperated beyond all self-control, and I believe did not know himself any longer. On hearing his first words, Elizabeth had risen to her feet, as if moved by a spring; and when he ceased, she stood as the blow had fallen upon her, with her flowers at her feet; but after a while she sat down again, and fastening her eyes on Mr. de Lusignan's face, she said, in a low tone,

"Mr. de Lusignan, is this manly?"

"Is it true?" he asked, and he handed her the letter, which he still held.

She looked at it, then handed it back to him with a calm, defying smile. Perhaps the danger was not that which she had feared—at all events, she was herself again.

- "Well," he said, "you do not deny it?"
- "No," she answered, rising again and con-

fronting him, "I do not deny it, sir!" Then, turning to Mr. Gray, who had stood and listened in silent amazement, she continued: "Be my witness! Mr. de Lusignan taxes me with not being his son's widow, and I will neither say one word, nor so much as lift up my finger to gainsay him. And now, sir," she resumed, addressing my guardian, "what next?"

"What next!" he cried, white with passion, nothing, save who are you?"

"Don't you know?" she answered, with cool irony. "I am Mrs. Smith. You have persecuted me for months, and now, thank Heaven! it is over, and I am Mrs. Smith again!"

I suppose my guardian's anger was spent, for he took one or two turns up and down the room; then, coming back to her, said, in a low tone of regret:

"Blame yourself for all this, Elizabeth. You left me no choice. You were as a daughter to me; your child was as my child."

She interrupted him with an impatient gesture of her hand.

"I am not your son's widow," she said; " she,

according to the clergyman's testimony—and Heaven forbid that I should deny it!—was flaxen-haired, and I am dark. I am not your son's widow—I never was his wife, and my child is not your grandchild. Is that what you want? Be satisfied you have it. I defy you to say that I sought you. I defy you to say that I wanted your love or your money. I am Mrs. Smith—are you satisfied, sir?"

- "Then you have nothing to tell me?"
- "Nothing!" Her eyes, her lips breathed defiance as she uttered the word; then, turning again to Mr. Gray:
- "After what has passed, Mr. Gray, need I say that you are free? The offer you made a while ago was made to Mr. de Lusignan's daughter-in-law, as you thought. You now know that she was Mrs. Smith all along, and a deceiver—for, with questionable good taste, my late father-in-law thrusts you into this matter. Believe me, however," she added softly, and with tears in her eyes, "I should not have deceived you—no, I should not have deceived you!"

What a Circe she was, and how irresistible was the cup which she held out to the lips of her lovers! Man of the world as he was, and startling as was the revelation which had been made in his presence, Mr. Gray was evidently affected by these simple words. He went up to her, took her hand, and said:

"Whoever you may be, you are a noble creature, I am sure; and—and will you allow me to say a few words in private to you?"

Elizabeth looked at him in doubt, then as-

sented by a silent inclination of her head. They walked out together, through the folding window, but went no farther than the terrace.

• For a few minutes they stood in close converse at the further end; then Mr. Gray took his leave, and Elizabeth stood on the terrace, as he had left her, with her eyes looking straight before her, and her hands closely clasped. At length, shaking her head as if she were putting by some baleful dream, she turned back, and entering the house, once more stood before us. I say that she stood before us, but her gaze was fastened on Mr. de Lusignan, and I doubt if in

that moment it saw either Mademoiselle or me.

"Sir," she said, in a calm and steady voice,

"if this house were yours, I should leave it this
moment. As it is not, you will not wonder if I
remain in it a few days longer—unless, indeed,
Miss Russell should make me feel that I am no
longer a welcome guest."

Mr. de Lusignan looked at her from the chair on which he had sunk, and sighed with a troubled air. I dare say that torrent of wrath which had rushed out of its bed in the first storm of discovery had now subsided—I believe, too, that her beauty still kept some of its old power over his heart, for it was with latent tenderness in his voice that he said:

"Elizabeth, let there be peace between us. I confess I forced this deceit upon you. Believe me, I have paid the full penalty of my error, for I have given my heart to a child who, it seems, is a stranger to me, and I am not sure that I can take it back. Only tell me who you are. I cannot believe that your long silence hides an unworthy secret. Only tell me that, and, as I said before, let there be peace between us."

He held cut his hand.

- "Never," she said, and her eyes flashed as she turned away. "Never so, Mr. de Lusignan. You are either the father of my dead husband, or you are nothing to my boy or me."
- "Tell me who you are," he persisted, without heeding her. "It is time yet, Elizabeth tell me, for the boy's sake."
- "I am Mrs. Smith," she answered, in a clear, cold voice; "don't you know it?"
- "Elizabeth, do you know what you are doing —what you are throwing away? What name and what fortune have you to leave your child?"
- "Smith, and three hundred a year," she answered with a careless laugh; "and now," she added, turning to the door, "tell Miss Russell all you please, Mr. de Lusignan, and remember that I ask and expect no mercy from you."

I saw my guardian's brow redden, but he did not answer this challenge. The door closed upon her, and for a few minutes we were all silent. Then my guardian rose, and, turning to me, he said:

"I cannot leave this house for a few days, at

least. During that time I wish your intercourse with the lady who has just left the room to be as restricted as common civility allows. If I should find that this prohibition of mine is unheeded by either that lady or by you, I must naturally take you away."

And having so spoken, he too left the room. I turned to Mademoiselle, who had not uttered one word all this time.

- "Oh, Mademoiselle!" I said, clasping my hands, "how will all this end?"
- "Heaven knows, Mignonne," she answered, looking sorely troubled. "Heaven knows, not I, for never in all my life was I so perplexed."

I looked at her; but she turned her head away.

- "Oh, Mademoiselle," I said, trembling from head to foot—"do you think—I mean,—do you not think that your Harry—I mean, do you suppose——"
- "I suppose nothing," interrupted Mademoiselle, reddening up and speaking almost passionately; "save that my darling was the soul of honour, and would not have joined O'Donnell if he had not been a free man."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE whole of that day I sat alone. No one came near me, and I could brood at leisure over all that had taken place. Two thoughts kept running in my brain, and chasing each other to weariness. "Who was Elizabeth? And was it, could it be true, that Mr. Herbert cared about me?"

And so a book lay unread on my lap, and the hours went by unheeded. When we all met again, it was at Miss Russell's dinner-table; and Miss Dunn, being present, acted like the glass wall which divided the Prince and the Princess so effectually in the fairy-tale. Mr. de Lusignan and Elizabeth could be as silent to each other as they pleased, whilst Miss Dunn talked common-place in a silvery voice.

"You can have no idea of poor dear Miss Russell's state," she said plaintively; "sometimes the pain is behind her ear, and sometimes right at the top of her head. She says she feels as if she had a grasshopper there; and really there is no knowing what she has got—now, is there? The human machine is so mysterious and complicated!"

And so Miss Dunn went on till dinner was over, and she lamented that she was compelled to leave us, and go to poor dear Miss Russell.

She was scarcely gone when my guardian walked out into the garden without addressing a word to any of us. I could not help watching him for a while, for Harry was playing on the terrace with Watkins, and Mr. de Lusignan, though he pretended to be staring another way, was looking at him furtively. Once Harry stumbled as he ran, and I saw Mr. de Lusignan's involuntary motion towards him, as if to pick him up—a motion quickly checked, and which the assistance of Watkins rendered needless. Did Elizabeth see this? I doubt it. Mademoiselle, who looked pale and ill, had left us; and

Elizabeth, after standing a while by the marble mantelpiece, said, without looking at me:

"Come up to my room, Bessie, will you?"

I followed her with a beating heart. Was she going to trust in me at last? We entered together that room to which I was so rarely summoned. How keen and vivid are the pictures which fate draws of the places wherein she acts her dramas! I still seem to see that room as I saw it then. The greyness of the morning had melted away into sunshine, and the evening had been warm and bright. A sunset sky spreading over masses of verdure, with low mists stealing through them, appeared in the square of the open window; whilst the crimson walls and furniture within looked gorgeous in the rich glow from the west. Elizabeth sat down in a deep chair facing the window, and resting her arms on its elbows, looked straight before her. I took a chair nearly facing hers, but I do not think she saw me. At length she spoke.

"Well, Bessie," she said, "what do you think of all this?"

I rose, and twining my arms around her neck, VOL. III. I said entreatingly: "Elizabeth, tell the truth, whatever it may be. Tell the truth."

She put me away rather coldly.

- "I have nothing to tell," she said. "Mr. de Lusignan forced himself upon me, and now chooses to withdraw—let him."
- "But Harry!" I pleaded, "listen to him!"—for we could hear a vehement quarrel between him and Watkins going on just then in the garden—"think of Harry."
- "And so I do," she said impatiently. "Mr. de Lusignan has left me no choice; Harry must have a stepfather. May he have a kind one, Bessie."
- "Will Mr. de Lusignan allow it, Elizabeth?"

 I asked.

She opened her eyes.

"Why not?" she said; "don't you know that his son's wife was fair-haired, and that since I cannot be that lady I surely am my own mistress?"

I did not know whether Elizabeth was or was not the widow of my guardian's son, but I knew, and with infinite sorrow I knew it, that, whatever her secret might be, I was excluded from it as completely as Mr. de Lusignan himself.

"I wish you had a home to offer me, Bessie," she resumed after a while. "I wish you were mistress of Gray's House for a fortnight or so. I should like to be out of this place for a few days, and yet not seem to run away from them all—from Miss Dunn especially. I don't mind telling you, Bessie, that she troubles me far more than Mr. de Lusignan. I know," she added, with a curl of her lip, "that he wants to keep me after all; and I know, too, that Miss Dunn has wished me out of this house from the moment I entered it. Would you believe it, Bessie, she has had the hope that, with her voice and her smoothness and all the rest of it, she could get Mr. Gray?"

Nothing could exceed my surprise on hearing Elizabeth speak thus. I was not so much amazed at Miss Dunn's ambition as at the evident irritation Elizabeth felt on the subject. She was indignant, and did not care to hide it.

"That is why I stay here," she resumed,

"even after what has passed this morning."

She knit her brows, as if vainly seeking some issue to this trouble; whilst I stood before her, asking myself if I were dreaming or not. A knock at the door here disturbed us both. It was only a servant with a message. Mr. Herbert was below, and asked to speak to Mrs. Henry de Lusignan. We exchanged looks.

"Very well," answered Elizabeth; and the girl closed the door and vanished "Go down to him, Bessie," said Elizabeth. "I have nothing to hear and nothing to say. You may tell him what you like," she added, a little impatiently, "anything, everthing—there, go like a good girl." And as I stood irresolute, she gently took me to the door and put me out.

I went down the stairs as slowly as if the delay of every step were a gain to me. I was not thinking of what I could tell Mr. Herbert, but of what he had said to me that morning, when I entered the drawing-room, where he stood waiting for me with the flowers which had fallen from the hand of Elizabeth, like the beauty and honour of her life, lying withered

and unseen at his feet. A solitary waxlight burned on the table, and lit his handsome face, now unusually grave, but it cleared on seeing me.

- "Ah! how good you are!" he said; "how very good to come!"
- "Elizabeth sent me," I replied; "she cannot come herself."
- "That is to say, she will not—then it is all over."
- "But you had better know what has happened," I said, getting frightened. "Mr. de Lusignan taxes her with not being his son's widow, and—and I believe she is going to marry Mr. Gray."

Mr. Herbert did not look moved, he did not even look surprised at hearing this. All he said was: "No, she will never marry him. Poor Elizabeth!"

His voice was full of pity—of pity, and nothing more; but I felt such perplexity, such anguish, so great a fear of coming calamity, that I clasped and wrung my hands in a sort of despair. Mr. Herbert came up to me at once.

"Do not," he entreated; "do not-all may

end better than you think. Only let her come to me at once, before I speak to Mr. de Lusignan and Mademoiselle Aubrey."

I did not answer him; I turned to the door, and leaving the room I ran upstairs eagerly, but as I ran I thought: "I wonder if he cares about her marrying Mr. Gray?" I had no time to linger over the thought, for at the head of the stairs I met her leaving Harry's room, and coming back to her own with a light in her hand.

"Oh, Elizabeth," I said hurriedly, "you must go down to Mr. Herbert—indeed you must. He has something to tell you—at once."

"What can be tell me that I shall care to hear?" she answered; "let him only tell me that he will be a kind stepfather to Harry. I want no more from him."

A thunderbolt falling at my feet would not have startled me more fearfully than these words. I suppose I looked very guilty, for Elizabeth, giving me a sharp look, said:

- "You have something to tell me?"
- "Yes," I faltered.
- "Tell me nothing here," she resumed; and

she opened my room door, and made a sign which I obeyed, that I should go in and pass by her.

"Well," she said, as she closed the door. I would have given worlds to be silent. I could not let her go down to Mr. Herbert with that strange error in her mind. Shrinking like a guilty thing, I faltered:

"Mr. Herbert wants to marry me."

There was a moment's pause; then Elizabeth said drily:

"In—deed! Well," she added, after a pause that seemed eternal to me, "what do you say to that? Yes, of course?"

"Elizabeth, you shall not wrong me!" I cried; "I refused him."

"Have him, if you like him, Bessie," she said. "Mr. Gray will do as well for me. And since I must be the most wretched of women, what need I care in whose company I am so?"

I looked at her; the light which she still held showed me a face in which misery was written.

"But why must you be wretched?" I asked; "do hear what Mr. Herbert----"

She interrupted me with a look.

"I want to hear nothing," she said; "and as to my being wretched—never mind me—be happy if you can, Bessie. You do not like Mr. Herbert yet, I daresay, but you will in time, and Gray's House is a lovely place."

Her words were torture to me. I could not bear them."

"I meant no harm; but—but I am afraid that James was right, and that I liked him all along, only I did not know it. No, believe me, not even this morning did I know it."

She looked at me in a sort of wonder.

"To like, and not know it! You must be wonderfully innocent, Bessie! The moment I liked I knew it. The very first second I saw him I thought, 'Oh! how happy she will be, the girl whom he marries;' and in that same moment he thought, as he told me later, 'That woman is the one—that one, and no other!'"

Her voice was even and low, but passion burned in her blue eyes, passion of which the very remembrance was more than any reality life could still offer. Truly, as I heard her, I understood that Mr. Herbert or Mr. Gray made little difference to her. To be wretched with the one, or wretched with the other, could not matter much to one whose heart was in a grave.

"Well, Bessie, you are true, at least," she said, holding out her hand, and taking mine, "for you need not have told me that. God bless you, and make you very happy; and do not trouble about me. Mr. Gray will do very well!" she added, with a dreary smile.

"Elizabeth, do not do that without having at least heard Mr. Herbert. Believe me, he has something to tell you at once, Elizabeth."

I would have said more, but the cold silence with which she heard me made the words falter on my lips.

"I must marry," she said. "The sooner it is over the better. Mr. Gray would not take my nay this morning, he shall have an ay to-morrow; and as to Mr. Herbert, he has nothing to say which I do not know beforehand; and if you will see him again for me, Bessie, you may tell him so. You may also tell him that life is over for

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me—over for ever. Good-bye; God bless you!"

She turned away like one who wanted no answer, and I gave her none. She took her light with her, and I stood, as she had left me, in my dark room, with the stars in the sky looking at me through the open window. The last words of Elizabeth rang in my ears like a knell. That life which was only beginning for me was over for her, she told me, and over for ever—awful doom for one so young! What need I, then, go down again to Mr. Herbert and tell him, "You were right, I have failed; she will hear—she will know nothing?" And yet, after a while, I went.

My heart beat as I reached the drawing-room door. If I could only tell him what I had to say, "Give up the hope of seeing Elizabeth," and then vanish. If I only could! To like a presence is not always to seek it willingly; and there is a liking which, inagirl's heart, goes hand-in-hand with fear. This was not the fear which I had felt of James Carr, poor fellow! who was always scolding and reproaching me—a strange way of love-making!—but another fear, all shy-

ness, all shrinking, which would have liked to possess the divine privilege of spirits, and seeing, not be seen. At length I opened the door, and entered the room with an abruptness which was only meant to hide cowardice.

But there was no need for maiden shyness now. The hour of grace had passed for Elizabeth; Mr. Herbert was no longer alone. He sat facing me, talking to Mr. de Lusignan and Mademoiselle, and it needed only a look at these two to understand that he was telling no common story. Mademoiselle leaned back in her chair, and her face was bathed in tears; my guardian stood by the mantelpiece, his elbows leaning upon it, and his dark face, on which appeared the deepest emotion, turned and bent towards Mr. Herbert. I believe they all saw me, but none of them stirred. Mr. Herbert went on speaking. I sat down on a chair by the door, and listened to him.

"I wish I could have told you this less abruptly; but remember that I was pledged to secrecy, and only released an hour ago."

"And he is alive? Oh! is it possible? After

all that grief, after all that misery, alive and coming!"

It was Mademoiselle who spoke. A wild thought crossed my brain. Had her dead Harry been only lost?—was he found again? And, wild as the thought seemed, it was the merest truth which Mr. Herbert's further words confirmed.

"I daresay," he continued "you remember that paragraph which appeared in the Times last year, whilst we were all in Fontainebleau? It was taken from a Melbourne paper, and said plainly that Henry de Lusignan, the explorer, had not been murdered by the natives, but only taken into remote captivity; that he was now free, and had been met and recognized by some travellers on his way to Sydney. I confess I put little faith in this story, but Harry de Lusignan had been my dear friend, and on reading this I went to London to see a man named Carter, of whom you have both heard."

"Yes," said Mr. de Lusignan, "he was the great man of the O'Donnell expedition, the only survivor, I believe, and he is dead now."

"Yes," continued Mr. Herbert, "he is dead; but when I applied to him I found him living in Belgravia, on the handsome annuity which a public subscription had purchased for him, as the tribute due to his indomitable perseverance in the cause of science. I knew that Carter had not merely brought home most valuable notes and information—he was a member of almost every learned society in Europe—but that he was still in constant, in almost daily intercourse with Australia. If anyone could give me certain news, he was the man. He laughed the paragraph from the Australian paper to scorn. did not merely see Lusignan fall by my side,' he said, 'but I buried him before I left the spot where he fell.' There was no answering this. I read, a few days later, a letter from Carter to the same purport, which appeared in the Times, and there the matter ended. month later I went to Australia to recover some long-lost money, which I sadly needed then. thought to remain months away—the news of my unexpected good-fortune came and changed all my plans. I was on the eve of departure, when, one evening, in a remote part of the town, and in a lonely street, I found myself face to face with Harry de Lusignan. I believe that if he could have denied his identity to me he would, but, altered though he was, he could not, and, indeed, did not attempt it; and now I will tell you word for word what passed between us. It was not much, but it was significant.

- "'Good heavens! Harry,' I said, laying my two hands on his shoulders, 'is it you, after all?'
- "'I suppose so,' he answered quietly, 'only do not tell the world about it, like a good fellow. I want to be dead a while longer.'
- "'But Carter knew you were living—when he told me that he had actually buried you!'
- "'Carter knew that I had detected him reading my private letters; that we had had a quarrel, and that he had stabbed me; robbed me of all my notes and papers, and left me dying of loss of blood in the sun,' was his answer.
- "I was astounded at so awful and so direct an accusation.
 - "'And it is because I bide my time,' he con-

tinued, 'that I wish to be dead a while longer. I shall soon go to England, and Carter will hear from me there. So now give me your word not to open your lips about having seen me till I authorize you to do so.'

"He was peremptory, and I had no alternative but to comply. He seemed satisfied when he had my pledge; he shook me warmly by the hand, promised to let me hear from him, and without giving me time to add a word, or put a question, he left me. From that day to this I have not see him."

"But you have heard from him!" cried Mademoiselle, sitting straight up with sudden terror on her pale face; "you told us so!"

"I heard from him an hour ago, but not once during all these months. When I came back to England I made a few quiet inquiries about Carter. He was still living in Belgravia, he was still enjoying his annuity, still a member of learned societies, and, above all, he was still the great Australian explorer; but of the man whom he had so basely robbed and murdered I could hear nothing. I had no right to stir, but Heaven alone

knows how hard I found it to keep my word; how often I asked myself, if Harry de Lusignan had not become the victim of a second crime committed, in order to conceal the first. The thought took a powerful hold of me, and perplexed me strangely, till the death of Carter, which we all read in the papers some time ago, set some of my doubts at rest. Whatever had happened, it was useless now for me to speak; but I could act, and I confess that I did so. I made inquiries, the result of which was very conflicting; from some reports it seemed all but certain that Henry de Lusignan had perished in the great wreck of the Sylph, on her way home to England; and from others, on the contrary, it seemed clear that he was alive and well in Melbourne. This letter proves that both accounts were equally false. Will you read it?"

He handed an open letter to Mademoiselle, but though she stretched out her hand, it shook so that she could not hold the paper. Mr. de Lusignan took it from her and read aloud.

" MY DEAR HERBERT,

"'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,'

and so I have found it. When I came to England, fully armed against my enemy as I thought, I was struck down with illness before I could raise a finger against him. For weeks and months I remained between life and death, powerless to punish my murderer, and powerless to seek those whom I loved. When I at last recovered, I learned the death of Carter, also that you had become owner of Gray's House in—shire, and that my uncle and my dearest friend were on a visit in your neighbourhood. I dare say you will take me in for a day or two, and break the news of my resurrection to them. I leave London to-morrow by the 7 P.M. train, which is due at 10 at Hanvil Station—"

Here Mademoiselle started up with a wild look. "He is coming!" she cried, staring round the room, "coming here—to-night——!"

She said no more, but sank back in her chair like one bereft of life.

I started up and ran to her.

"Oh! Mr. Herbert, open the window!" I cried; and looking round at him, I saw the pale face of Elizabeth, who stood behind his chair as pale, as still, as white as a statue. I do not know how long she had been there, nor how she had come in unseen and unheard among us. It cannot have been by the door near which I was sitting I think it must have been through the terrace and the folding window, for it was there I found her little cambric handkerchief torn to shreds. half an hour later. What followed was all confusion. Mademoiselle had fainted, and as I attempted to restore her, Elizabeth came up and quietly put me by. Then Miss Dunn came in, and was all questioning and all amazement; and at length Mademoiselle was restored to consciousness, and taken up to her room, to which Elizabeth accompanied her. I wanted to go up with them, but my guardian bade me stay below.

- "All she wants is quietness," he said, and I believe he said it to keep away Miss Dunn.
- "It is half-past nine," he added, looking at his watch; "shall we go to the station?"
 - "Willingly," answered Mr. Herbert.

They went and left me with Miss Dunn.

"I never heard anything like it!" exclaimed Miss Dunn, clasping her hands. "Talking of absurdities and romance, and all that, why, they are nothing to that, are they, now? And that Mr. Henry de Lusignan not to be dead, after all these years! I remember him so well—such a handsome man!"

"You knew him!" I exclaimed, surprised and startled; for that was Miss Dunn's way, to bring out pieces of unexpected information, just as a thief brings out a pistol.

"He came several times to Miss Russell's," she answered coolly—"she is such an amateur of all clever people, you know. She asked him to one of her conversaziones. Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, then Miss Clare, was present. They were both so handsome, I thought; but of course she was handsomer as a woman than he as a man. Poor lady! it is hard that it should not be her husband coming to life again. I wonder if he is married—but I fancy not. I think all the members of that expedition took some oath, or some pledge, or some vow not to marry. Did you not understand something of the kind, Miss Carr?"

I feigned deafness. I was no match for Miss

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Dunn with her news and her questions. I felt that Elizabeth stood on the edge of a precipice, and I vowed in my heart that, whatever her sin might be, no hand of mine should push her in. So, instead of answering Miss Dunn, I rose, and went and picked up Elizabeth's little white handkerchief, which I saw lying on the floor near the folding window.

"What is it?" asked Miss Dunn, with sudden quickness—"a letter? I saw a letter when I came in."

I answered that it was a handkerchief; and, putting it in my pocket, I declared my intention of going up to see how Mademoiselle was getting on. Miss Dunn, too, would go upstairs; poor dear Miss Russell would be so glad to hear all this. Mr. Henry de Lusignan had always been such a favourite of hers. I believe Miss Dunn also wanted to have a peep at Mademoiselle, for she stopped with me at her door; but if such was her wish, it was not gratified. It was Elizabeth who opened the door, and stood on the threshold, calm, though pale, but by no means inviting our entrance.

"Mademoiselle Aubrey is better," she said; "but requires to be quiet a little while longer."

"Ah! poor dear!" exclaimed Miss Dunn, "I daresay she does." And she went on to Miss Russell's room. I stood, half expecting to be called in by Mademoiselle's voice, but I was not; so merely putting Elizabeth's handkerchief in her hand, I turned away without saying a word.

CHAPTER XIV.

MY room was dark, but through the open window I saw a pale starry sky. I went and leaned out. I felt in a fever, and the fresh night air tempted me. I tried to think, but thought only frightened me. Grief and humiliation, if not for me, at least for one whom I loved, stood on either side of the only path open to her Self-will had dug beneath her feet a pit in which she must now fall, and who could help her? "Poor Elizabeth!" Mr. Herbert had said. Ay, poor Elizabeth indeed, if half of what I feared were true! Her fate, such as it was, was on its road-it was coming fast; and with a beating heart I listened to the sounds of the night. Some distant clock struck ten; then there was a long pause; then a dog barked incessantly for ten minutes; then another silence followed, and at length I heard steps and voices coming up the road that led to Hanvil house. "This way, Harry," said my guardian; a door clanged, then all was still.

Then it was true, no false story, but an actual fact, the long-lost nephew, Mademoiselle's Harry, was below. I did not stir; I did not feel that I was wanted in that family meeting. I remained where I was, looking at the night. It was calm again. The clock had no hour to tell, the dog had fallen asleep, the stars shone with that unchanging brightness of theirs which seems so cold to the impassioned heart of man.

"Come weal, come woe, what is it to me?" each star seemed to say from its place in the sky; "I am bright, and I am eternal. Why should I vex myself with what goes on below?"

The sound of my door opening behind me, and a light which suddenly filled my room, made me turn round. It was Elizabeth. I suppose I looked startled, for she said softly:

"Do not be afraid, Bessie, it is I."

I went up to her; but she pointed to the window. I turned back and closed it, then came again to her. She put down the light which she held, and looked at me very earnestly.

"Bessie," she said in a low tone, "you love me, I know you love me. Will you save me? you can."

I did not ask her how I could save her. I flung my arms around her neck, and all the love in my heart arose to my lips.

"Anything, Elizabeth, anything!" I said; "I will do anything for you."

"God bless you, my darling! Well, then, sit down and hear me."

She still held my hand, and making me sit down on the edge of my bed, she sat down by me.

"You know what Mr. de Lusignan taxed me with this morning," she said. "Well, then, Bessie, it is true: I am not his son's widow; but the guilt of the deceit be on the head of him who forced his name and his money upon me! I cannot undo what he has done without

betraying my secret, and wild horses will not make me do that!" she added, with a short laugh. "That secret, Bessie, only one human being can betray, and he is now below."

"Mr. de Lusignan's nephew," I said, looking at her—"have you seen him?"

"No," she answered quietly, "I have not; but I listened at the head of the stairs, and I heard his voice in the hall ten minutes ago. I have the sort of memory which never forgets a voice, so I knew his at once. It is he, Bessie—as sure as you and I are sitting here, it is he."

I looked at her again; for as I sat thus by her side, I felt her shivering in every limb, but her self-command and her self-control were not gone.

"Mr. de Lusignan has just sent for me," she resumed. "I know his purpose, and I will defeat it, no matter at what cost, no matter how. He shall not conquer me—I say he shall not! And now, Bessie, what I want of you is this: go down, see this nephew of his, and give him this."—She put a slip of paper in my hand as she spoke.—"He must get this to-night," she

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continued, "for I can guess what has passed, and what trap is lying open for me. Miss Russell has beyond doubt asked this nephew of Mr. de Lusignan's to stay here for a day or so. Depend upon it, Bessie, he is to sleep here tonight; and though I have sent word that I am too unwell to go down, I shall have to meet him to-morrow, do what I can to avoid it; and that is why I want you, my darling, to give him these few lines to-night—now—actually now. You can read them," she added, calmly, and mechanically I cast my eyes upon the paper and read:—

"I was Mrs. Smith when we met last; now I am here with my child as Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, your cousin's widow. Keep my secret for me, and nothing—nothing in this world shall make me betray it."

"And now you know how my fate lies in your hands," she continued. "That man has my secret; he may not know that it is so, but he has; and, Bessie, I know enough of him to say that, unless taken by surprise, he will never betray me."

I looked at her very sadly.

"So you are not Mrs. Henry de Lusignan, after all?" I exclaimed, with involuntary regret and reproach. "Oh! Elizabeth, will you not trust me? Who are you?"

She turned her head away.

- "Bessie," she said, in a low tone, "the hardest sting in my lot has been deceiving you; I was driven to it—but oh! how often I longed to open my heart to you, and I could not—I could not! I cannot even now."
- "Never mind who you are?" I cried, with sudden emotion. "Whoever you may be, Elizabeth, I love you—I love you!"
- "And you will do what I ask you to do?" she said, smiling down in my face.
 - "Yes," I answered, smiling too, "I will do it."
 - "To-night?" she said, coaxingly.
- "Perhaps I cannot do it to-night, Elizabeth," I replied, hesitatingly.
- "Then you will get up with dawn to-morrow

 —I shall waken you, if need be—and watch
 and give him that paper before I come down.

 I shall be ill, and come down late; but, Bessie,

you must try to do it now-you must indeed."

"But how so, Elizabeth?" was the only objection I ventured to make. I was wholly under her control, as ductile an instrument in her hands as she could wish me to be. "What shall I say if I go down now?" I asked, hesitatingly.

"I have thought of that," she answered, coolly—she had thought of everything, as I found later, during the ten minutes that had passed since the arrival of Mr. de Lusignan's nephew. I have left my smelling-bottle below—I was using it for Mademoiselle, you know—and you can go and look for it, and if you say, Bessie, that I am ill, and require it, you will say the truth, and nothing but the truth."

"But when I have found it I must come up again," I argued, "and that may be immediately."

"You may not find it at once," she replied, in a tranquil tone; "besides, I daresay he will help you; he will move at least—well, then, you can manage to be near him, and to slip the paper into his hands."

I was as frightened at this suggestion as if the purport of her words had not reached me before.

"Oh, Elizabeth!" I said, shrinking back terrified; "how can I do that?"

"If I could do it myself, would I ask you?" she replied.

I remembered howshe had watched by mysick-bed, and I felt passive in her hands; but surely her case must have been a desperate one indeed when she had to take such a step as this, and to rely on so poor an instrument as myself? I made no further remonstrance; I thrust the paper she had given me into my pocket, and, rising, I went to the door. Elizabeth followed me, and when we stood together on the threshold she pushed me back a little, and looked deep into my eyes.

"Bessie," she said in a low tone, "remember that this is life and death to me."

"I shall remember it," I said, and I went down.

Once I was out of Elizabeth's sight, all the bravery I had felt to accomplish her errand left me, and terror took possession absolute of my whole being. How could I enter unbidden that room where my guardian and his long-lost nephew, where Mademoiselle and her darling were meeting again, after the cold hand of death himself had seemed to part them? How could I face a man who was a stranger to me, and put a written paper by stealth into his hand? It was impossible! I must go and tell Elizabeth that it was impossible. I turned back, and went up several steps: then I paused, for her last words rang in my heart: "Remember that this is life and death to me."

Come what would, I must do her errand. I must at least attempt it. Abruptly, with a sort of despair, I opened the door of the drawing-room, where several voices were talking loud, and entered without knocking. My guardian, who stood with his back to me, turned round sharply, and a stranger—thin, pale, and worn, but with a broad brow, and the handsomest of dark eyes, looked at me from the depths of an arm-chair. By him sat Mademoiselle, and their hands were clasped; Miss Dunn, and Miss Russell

who had miraculously recovered from her headache, were also present; but my heart fell when I saw that Mr. Herbert, on whom I had vaguely relied, was not there.

Mr. de Lusignan's face darkened so visibly on seeing me that I stood still at the door, frightened out of all presence of mind.

- "Well, Bessie?" he said.
- "Elizabeth has left her smelling-bottle here," I faltered, "and she is quite unwell, and sent me for it."
- "I saw it in her hand when she went up," he said shortly.

He was so evidently annoyed that I saw the stranger give him a look of slight surprise, which from him came to me, resting upon me with not unkind scrutiny. I could not myself help looking at this long-lost Harry with some emotion. He was, as I have said, a sallow, slender man, worn and thin, but with all the fire of youth in his eyes.

- "May I not look for it?" I asked, scarcely knowing what I said.
 - "I saw it in her hand when she went up with

Mademoiselle Aubrey," answered my guardian; "but you may look for it, of course."

He came up to my side and stood by me whilst I looked on the table. Elizabeth's slip of paper was in my left hand; with my right I moved the books, albums, and photographs. My errand was a hopeless one, and I knew it, but my mind was so absorbed with it that the discourse around me only reached me in confused fragments. "Blue mountains," "Lake Torrens," and "Natives," from the traveller; and the remark, more characteristic than elegant, "What a set of villains!" periodically uttered by Miss Russell, struck me most. I also gathered that Elizabeth's surmise was correct—Miss Russell had pressed her hospitality on the stranger, who had accepted it.

"Well, Bessie," said my guardian, "do you think Elizabeth left her smelling-bottle here?"

I replied in a low tone that I supposed not, and was turning to the door, when Mademoiselle called me back.

"Mignonne," she said, drawing me to her side, "this is my Harry. I have not had time

yet to talk to you about Mignonne," she added, turning to him, "but if you do not know her, she knows you well, Harry."

He smiled, and the smile, though brief, lit his worn face with strange beauty. Oh, if I could have seen him alone and said a few words to him! How sure I felt that Elizabeth, whoever she might be, would get mercy from him, and be safe in his hands! But as I stood before him, with every eye bent upon us, I was helpless and powerless, and could only listen to Mademoiselle, and, when she had done speaking, say that I must go back to Elizabeth, and leave the room with my errand unfulfilled.

Elizabeth was waiting for me in my room, still sitting on the edge of my bed as I had left her.

"You have failed," she said. "I knew you would; but it was a desperate case, and now what shall I do?"

She buried her face in her hands. I thought she was crying, but when she looked up again there was the brightest smile on her face.

"Come, Bessie, which is the better course,"
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she said—"to go away by the earliest train, or to keep my room with a bad attack of neuralgia? I know he will not stay long here, and when he is gone I can defy Mr. de Lusignan."

I was no adept in the art of deceit, and I could not advise Elizabeth. I believe she never even thought of my scruples. Heart, soul, mind, and every faculty were bent on escaping the present danger. She would have gone through fire and water, she would have risked her immortal soul ten times over, rather than be defeated.

"Elizabeth," I suggested, "why not try to see that Mr. Henry de Lusignan? Since he stays here he may not be so difficult——"

"Difficult!" she interrupted with a bitter laugh, "take my word for it, Bessie, I shall have every opportunity to do so that Mr. de Lusignan can devise; but do you think I will give him that opportunity of shaming me which he longs for? No—he has forced this war upon me, and, I say it again, I will fight bravely to the last! And now," she added after a while, "I can tell you what you are to do for me, Bessie.

It will be very easy this time. Put the paper you have brought back inside an envelope, direct it to Mr. Henry de Lusignan, and take it early to-morrow morning to the post-office. It will be delivered to him in the course of the day, and then," she added with a sigh of relief, "all will be well."

"Elizabeth, if you were to ask Mr. Herbert," I began hesitatingly.

She rose and looked at me with flashing eyes.

"Do you not see that I would not trust even you if I could help it!" she exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed passion, "and you want me to bring Mr. Herbert into my counsel! Why not Miss Russell or Miss Dunn? I assure you I care as much about them as I do about Mr. Herbert."

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"And yet you would have married him!" I said in a low tone.

She turned dreadfully pale, and walked to the door; I ran after her.

"Elizabeth, I meant no harm," I said anxiously; "do not mind what I said, but indeed you

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length the real morning came, the real hour for rising and doing the errand of Elizabeth.

She did not come near me, as I had hoped she would, if it were only to urge me on, as the spur may urge the failing steed. She left me to myself and to my own ingenuity, in order to accomplish the task she had laid upon me.

I had but one fear, because there was in truth but one danger, that of being met on my way to or from the post-office; but fortune favoured me so far. I got out of the house unperceived. I did not meet a soul either on my way to Hanvil or on my return, and it was only as I was coming back through the garden, that I was suddenly confronted by my guardian and his nephew.

"You are out early, Miss Carr," said Mr. de Lusignan, with cold politeness.

I stammered that the garden was so pleasant in the morning.

"Oh! delightful!" he answered ironically; "do you know how Elizabeth is this morning?" he added abruptly.

Truly thankful was I to be able to answer

are wrong to treat Mr. Herbert so. He is your true friend—he is indeed!"

- "I suppose so," she answered, in a tone of supreme indifference; "but all this is mere waste of time. Will you do what I ask you to do, Bessie?"
- "You know I will, Elizabeth," I said eagerly, glad that her anger should be over.
- "Well, then, do it at once," she said impatiently.

It was soon done. Elizabeth put the paper she had written into an envelope, which I directed and placed on my table ready for the morning; and Elizabeth giving it a grave, attentive look, thanked me coldly, and bidding me a good night, left me.

Did I sleep that night? It seems to me that I did not, and that its hours were spent in one feverish dream. I was always climbing one of the steep rocks in Fontainebleau, and just when I reached its summit breathless and weary, finding myself below again. Then I would waken disappointed and unrefreshed, to fall asleep once more, and climb that hopeless rock anew. At

length the real morning came, the real hour for rising and doing the errand of Elizabeth.

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that I had not seen her, and did not know.

"Ah! to be sure," said Mr. de Lusignan, kicking a pebble with his foot, and smiling as he looked at the ground—"to be sure."

And they went on.

I stole up to the room of Elizabeth, and knocked at her door like a guilty thing.

"Come in," said her voice.

I found her standing in the middle of the floor, pale and breathless, like one waiting her doom.

"The letter is gone," I said.

She breathed a deep sigh of relief and sat down.

"He will get it to-day," she said, "and until he gets it I remain in my room, very poorly with neuralgia—don't I, Bessie?"

I did not answer.

"Don't have any scruples," she said, with a curl of her lip. "I shall do it all myself. Perhaps you had better leave me," she added, a little impatiently: "people who have got neuralgia don't talk much, do they?"

Thus dismissed, I turned to the door. I had

not reached it, when Elizabeth was behind me, with her two arms around my neck, and her cheek laid to mine.

"God bless you!" she said softly, "and don't mind my horrid temper. I can't help it, Bessie, I can't; the strain is too great—the trial is too hard!"

And laying her head on my shoulder, she sobbed there as if her heart would break.

How could I be vexed with her?—how could I even blame her? I could only love and pity, and feel the deepest tenderness for one so sorely tried. But she had asked me to leave her, and I felt it was well I should do so. I also felt relieved when her door closed on me, for Elizabeth lived in an atmosphere of untruth and mystery, which oppressed me strangely. I could pity, I could forgive, and I could love—but do what I would, I could not but blame in my heart. Elizabeth did not appear at the breakfast-table. Her neuralgia was so severe that she actually sent for a physician, who prescribed absolute repose. This bulletin came as we were all sitting down to breakfast.

"Very unfortunate," drily said Mr. de Lusignan; "you must stay until Elizabeth is well, Harry. You have seen the boy. He is like his poor father—is he not?"

"I think he is more like you," replied his nephew.

"You must see his mother too," resumed my guardian. "She is a lovely woman—is she not, Miss Russell?"

"Oh, very!" answered Miss Russell; "do tell me about these savages again, Mr. Harry—I must call you Mr. Harry, you know."

"But Mr. Henry de Lusignan has seen his cousin's widow!" began Miss Dunn, in tones of silver.

My heart nearly failed me—Elizabeth's secret was lost—irrecoverably lost! but rescue came under the aspect of Miss Russell.

"Oh! never mind," she said impatiently. "I want to hear about the savages."

"Where did Harry see her?" sharply asked my guardian, turning on Miss Dunn, whilst his nephew looked suddenly interested, and also much surprised. "And I say I want to hear about the savages!" exclaimed Miss Russell, giving Miss Dunn an irate look, and tapping her saucer with her silver spoon. "I wish you would not imagine or invent such absurdities, Dunn!"

I had often admired the empire which Miss Dunn exercised over her capricious mistress, but it was a suggestive empire rather than an empire absolute. To my surprise she now unsaid her own words with perfect readiness.

- "Ah, to be sure," she said, "what a mistake! I was thinking of Mr. Reed."
- "Of course you were," pettishly said Miss Russell, who had not put by her headache and come down to breakfast in order to hear family matters discussed. "And now do let me hear about these savages," she added, with an imploring, pathetic tone. "I adore savages—Fenimore Cooper's are such dears—are they not, Mademoiselle Aubrey?"

Mademoiselle's voice shook a little as she answered:

"Miss Russell, will you kindly wait to hear Harry's adventures until I can leave the room? I feel I cannot bear to hear of his sufferings yet. I know it is very weak of me, but I cannot help it—indeed I cannot!"

"But since he is alive and well?" urged Miss Russell, who looked very blank.

Harry de Lusignan, without giving Mademoiselle time to reply, said quietly:

"I am afraid I cannot gratify you this morning, Miss Russell. My story is a long one, and I must leave you this afternoon; and there are, besides, circumstances connected with my captivity into which I cannot yet enter very fully." Miss Russell looked remarkably cross on hearing this, and took her breakfast in sulky silence. The meal indeed was a silent one, and we all dispersed when it was over. Miss Russell was wheeled to the Chinese pavilion, where she was attended by Miss Dunn. My guardian and his nephew walked up and down the terrace talking earnestly, and Mademoiselle sat down in a chair by the window, feasting her eyes with the sight of her Harry.

I suppose hers was pure perfect happiness, for though unconscious tears filled her eyes, she smiled all the time as her hand brushed them away. I thought she was not aware of my presence, but she was, for without turning round or averting her happy eyes, she said to me:

"Mignonne, I now understand the meaning of Simeon's 'Nunc Dimittis.' It is happiness to go when a great joy has come, for after that can only come sorrow. The aged prophet was glad because be had beheld the salvation of Israel, but he did not ask to see the Passion and the Cross, that were to be its fulfilment. So do I feel. This joy is enough for me; I dare not ask for more, lest gladness should close in sorrow."

She bowed her head, and the tears fell over her clasped hands. I went up to her and clasped my hands around her neck, and, without looking at her, I whispered:

"Dear Mademoiselle, you will never be angry with me, will you?"

She seemed to know what I meant, for, without questioning me, she replied quietly:

"No, Mignonne, it was too hard a trial for you."

She did not, could not know how hard it was !

My guardian and his nephew were still walking up and down the terrace; just as they reached the window in which we sat, a servant came up to them, handed three letters on a plate to my guardian, and gave his nephew-none. heart gave a great leap in my bosom. I was in agonies! My letter, Elizabeth's fate, lay in the hands of her enemy! How had we not thought that similarity of name might lead to so easy a mistake? My guardian put down two of the letters on a vase of scarlet geraniums by him, broke the seal of the one he held, and read it slowly. His nephew, to leave him freer, walked down the terrace; and Mademoiselle, leaving me, went out and joined him. I took up a newspaper and pretended to read the advertisements, but all the time I was looking furtively at Mr. de Lusignan. The letter he was reading was too long a one to be mine; but when he had finished it and put it into his pocket, and took up the second letter, my heart sank again, and I had a mind to run away. I did not-one never does, there is ever something that tempts one on to one's fate, just as the precipice tempts the

wretch half hanging over it. The second letter was soon read, and the third taken up; this, then, was mine. Mr. de Lusignan looked at it, then raising his voice, said quietly:

"This is for you, Harry."

His nephew turned round, and seeing the letter in his uncle's outstretched hand, came and took it with a surprised air; then, to my infinite relief, put it into his pocket and turned back to Mademoiselle, with whom he soon walked down a garden path. I had forgotten my guardian in looking at them, but as they vanished, and I turned back, I found him looking steadily at me. I returned the look with a sort of fascination; and beckoning to me, Mr. de Lusignan signed me to go out and join him. I obeyed, more dead than alive.

"Come with me," he said.

He took me no farther than the first flowerbed, but far enough for us to be out of earshot. When we had reached it, he stood still and said coldly:

"You have done a wrong thing, Miss Carr, but you may tell your friend that it is a useless thing. She will never make my nephew her accomplice." With these words he left me.

I stood for a while like one rooted to the spot, then I walked on straight before me, feeling that I could not meet Elizabeth. I had not walked ten minutes before I found myself close to the Chinese pavilion, where Miss Dunn sat reading the paper to Miss Russell. By what magic did Miss Dunn already know that the traveller had received a letter, and why did she choose me as the very person to whom she felt bound to express her wonder on that subject? "So odd that anyone should know Mr. Henry de Lusignan was here, you know! For it came by post." Luckily Miss Russell was in the mood for contradiction, for with a very sharp "Nonsense, it came from Mr. Herbert, of course," she attempted to dismiss the subject.

But Miss Dunn was pertinacious, "I thought you know that Mr. Herbert would have sent a servant round with a note, and would never have sent it by post, you know."

My agonies increased with every word she uttered, for oh! how had we never thought of

these plain objections. But again, to my infinite relief, Miss Russell declared that Mr. Herbert would never send a note by a servant, who would be sure to get tipsy; and that he would, on the contrary, have it posted, as the post was the only safe and rational means of conveying letters. Miss Dunn did not look beaten, and I hurried away before she had found out any new fact or argument wherewith to worry me. Less than ever could I face Elizabeth; indeed I wanted to face no one, and went to the orchard for solitude.

It was very quiet and very lonely. I went to a remote spot, where low apple-trees shed a cool green shade on the high grass, and I sat down there, feeling oppressed with fear and care. The keeping of this secret of Elizabeth's was too much for me. I was not trusted, and yet I felt both miserable and guilty. Oh! if I could only lay my weary burden on Mr. Herbert, and put it by for awhile! If I could only go to him in my trouble and tell him: "Carry this for me—it is too heavy, and I cannot bear it. Do it, for you are strong, and I am weak."

For he was strong, I saw it now, stronger than I had imagined. He had guessed the secret of Elizabeth in Fontainebleau, and mastered his love on the knowledge with strange power in a man so young. He had felt that she should not be his, and had turned his heart away from her with inexorable firmness. They had met again, and passion had not resumed her empire, for hers had been the true death, and not the lull which leads to the saddest falls, as resting on the deepest error.

And so my thoughts wandered away, and were leading me very far indeed, far from Elizabeth and her troubles, when the sound of a step aroused me. I looked up, and saw Harry de Lusignan coming up the path, and walking slowly in its chequered shade and sunshine. He was alone; he was smoking a cigar, and he held my letter in his hand. Again he looked at it curiously; then he sat down on a bench beneath a tall pear-tree, tore the envelope open, let it fall carelessly to the ground, and read the slip of paper I had placed within it.

I held my breath. I was all eyes, all vision,

and all sense to read the meaning of his face. It told me nothing. He was unconscious of my presence, yet not one of the muscles of his countenance moved, his lids did not quiver, his colour did not come or go, but he sat there gazing straight before him. After a while he rose, picked up the envelope without looking at it, then walked away. He paused not far from the spot where I still sat, but he never saw me.

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CHAPTER XV.

NEXPRESSIBLE relief invaded my whole being. Elizabeth was safe at last. I could not doubt it. I had seen it with my own eyes. Harry de Lusignan had read those few lines, which were to save her from cruel humiliation. I must go and tell her. I ran away light of foot and light of heart, and only slackened my speed when I reached the house, but I met none of the faces I feared to encounter. My guardian, Mademoiselle, Miss Dunn, were invisible. only perplexity now was what I should say, or how much I should say, to Elizabeth. I entered my room to solve the question, and found a letter lying on the table. It was only an envelope, inside of which Elizabeth had written: "Come to me, I can bear this no longer! Come in without knocking."

I went at once. I found Elizabeth lying dressed on her bed, in a darkened room. She did not stir when I came in, and it was only when closing the door I said, "It is I, Elizabeth," that she sat up, and uncovering her face, exclaimed in a low tone,

"Well!"

Never shall I forget her aspect! The darkened room and the crimson curtains may have added to the pallor of her countenance, but they cannot have given it that look of breathless pain, which scarcely passed away when I answered, "It is all right; he has read it."

"He has read it," she repeated mechanically; and sinking back on her pillow, she turned her face to the wall.

I stood at the foot of her bed, silent and perplexed. Should I tell her more than this, though she did not question? Whilst I was deliberating, Fate decided the matter, under the aspect of Miss Dunn, who entered the room.

She cannot have knocked, or, standing still as I was, I must have heard her; yet, with her imperturbable coolness, she said:

"I scarcely dared to come in, yet being authorized by you, Miss Carr, I thought I might venture."

Elizabeth never moved, but I turned round and looked at Miss Dunn with a scepticism I did not attempt to disguise.

- "You are mistaken," I said coldly. "I did not know you were coming in."
- "Oh! indeed. I am so sorry. Well, I am not going to worry poor Mrs. Henry, you know she seems so poorly. I came up to tell you, Miss Carr, that Mr. de Lusignan wants you. His nephew is going away at once, and not finding you in your room I came here. I thought his cousin's widow might like to see him before he left, you know."
- "Are you sure he is going away, Miss Dunn?"
 I asked, much surprised.
- "Yes, he has just got a letter, you know, and it seems he must go at once. He looks in a dreadful way, and Mr. de Lusignan is exasperated, and Mademoiselle sadly cut up! And I really am afraid this great Australian traveller has a temper. Poor little Harry ran up to him,

poor child, and he scowled at the boy and pushed him away, and I thought, if Mrs. Henry would try to come down, it might mend matters."

"Bessie," here said the voice of Elizabeth in a whisper.

I went up to the head of her bed and bent over her.

"Don't let her worry me so," she whispered in my ear; "take her away!"

"I believe we must both leave Mrs. Henry de Lusignan," I remarked, turning back to Miss Dunn.

"Ah, I suppose so," she said, with as much complacency as if I were giving her a piece of good news. I saw she would not go unless I did, so I turned to the door, and opening it for her to pass first, I followed her out. She was going down stairs, and I thought it best to go down with her. All the way down Miss Dunn deplored Mrs. Henry's neuralgia, and wondered if some drops which she had would not be efficacious in her case. She had gone up with the intention of proposing them, but had unaccountably forgotten to do so. And so she chatted on,

tormenting me so that I would have given anything to escape her, but not releasing me one second.

"They are not in the drawing-room," she said, as I was going to enter; "they are all in the garden with Miss Russell. I shall take you to the spot."

I groaned at Miss Dunn's officiousness, but, to do her justice, she had a purpose in sticking close to me, which she discovered after we had walked five minutes side by side.

"Nerves are the oddest things," she said; and I think my drops are excellent; but that counter-stimulant is the best of all remedies. I don't mind telling you," she added, laughing in my face, "that I exaggerated a little, in order to rouse poor Mrs. Henry. Miss Russell sent me in for her fan, and so I thought I would try a counter-stimulant on Mrs. Henry. I find it wonderful at times on Miss Russell," she added, with rare coolness.

I stood still and looked at her.

"Then Mr. de Lusignan's nephew is not going away!" I exclaimed.

- "Well, you know, he said he was going today," she replied smiling.
- "But Mr. de Lusignan did not send for me," I persisted.
- "He asked if I knew where you were," answered Miss Dunn, with great tranquillity.
- "In short, all you said upstairs was invention!" I cried, fairly exasperated.
- "Oh! dear, what a uncivilized word!" said Miss Dunn, still smiling. "You are not going away, Miss Carr?"
- "Yes, I am," I answered indignantly; "since Mr. de Lusignan did not send for me, I have no wish to go to him now."

And without deigning to give this arrant deceiver a look, I walked back to the house. I thought it but right to go and tell Elizabeth that there was not one word of truth in all that Miss Dunn had been saying, for the kind purpose of curing her neuralgia by a counter-stimulant. But who says that evil has not its day and its hour? This petty and mean artifice of Miss Dunn's, so shallow that she did not even attempt to hide it, accomplished the object she

had in view, as surely as if it had been a deeply laid plan.

When I reached the room of Elizabeth, her bed was empty, she was gone—gone to meet the snare—gone to fall into the pit dug beneath her feet. I hurried down stairs again, thinking to overtake her; but I had missed her coming in, and when, hastening through the garden, I reached the spot to which Miss Dunn was leading me, I saw Elizabeth, who must have taken a short cut by walking through the flower-beds, coming towards the group gathered round the Chinese pavilion. Miss Russell, in her yellow chair, and Miss Dunn were in the deepest and coolest part of the little building. Mademoiselle sat near the door, and Mr. de Lusignan and his nephew stood outside in the shade. Elizabeth paused as she reached them. She was pale as death, but perfectly calm. She was fully dressed, and wore her hat as if she wanted to take a morning walk.

"I am glad you made the effort, Elizabeth," said Mr. de Lusignan, looking first at her, then at his nephew.

His voice was cold as ice and hard as steel. I felt faint and sick with terror at what was coming; for that it was coming at last, I knew.

"Come in here to us, Mrs. Henry," cried Miss Russell from within, and her dark face looked out through the window, "it is so cool in here."

Elizabeth did not answer. I do not think she heard, and I am sure she did not see Miss Russell.

"I believe you are strangers," resumed Mr. de Lusignan; then, after a pause, "Elizabeth, allow me to introduce my nephew to you."

Harry bowed gravely; Elizabeth looked civil, but distant; then leaning against the tall pedestal of one of the two stone vases which stood on either side of the door, she looked at the silver stars which spangled her black fan. She seemed very calm, as I said, but I could see her bosom heaving under her lace fichu.

"And this is my grandson," said Mr. de Lusignan, as little Harry went bounding by.

Elizabeth raised her eyes; they gave Mr. de

Lusignan a flashing glance of defiance; then she bent them again on her fan.

- "A fine boy," said his nephew, but he never looked at the child.
- "You will be sure to get your neuralgia back again if you stay out there," said Miss Russell, again thrusting her head out of the window.
- "Harry, you are going to-day, you say; before you go, be arbiter between your cousin's widow and me," said Mr. de Lusignan. "If this boy's mother, being still so young, must needs change her name and go to another home, should not, in common justice, the boy stay with me?"

I saw Elizabeth biting her pale lips, but she said not a word. Harry, however, showed some emotion.

- "And is this event so imminent?" he asked huskily.
- "It seemed to be so yesterday," replied Mr. de Lusignan, looking at Elizabeth.

She remained in the same attitude, leaning against the pedestal, and still toying with her fan, but otherwise as immovable as a martyr at

the stake. Harry raised his eyes to her face, and looked at her steadily; then turned them away and only said:

"In-deed!"

"Surely you see no objection to it," said his uncle, with a bitter laugh; "time passes over every grief, and young and beautiful widows will be admired and have their chance of wooers; but a woman might go farther and fare worse than with Mr. Gray."

"Indeed!" said Harry, looking at Elizabeth again.

Death is not paler than her face was then.

"Yes, indeed," said my guardian, laughing again, though the veins in his forehead were thick and swollen with passion. "You seem amazed, Harry, instead of wishing all happiness to the bride."

His nephew neither answered nor seemed to heed him.

"Elizabeth," he said.

She looked at him without stirring.

"Come here," he added gently. She went up to him; he took her hand and drew her to his side, and said tenderly, "How could you doubt me?"

She did not answer, but clasped her two arms around his neck, and laying her head on his shoulder, she said, "At last, at last!"

"Uncle," said Harry, looking up in Mr. de Lusignan's face, "why have you done this? Elizabeth is my wife, and it seems that you know it. Then why did you not say to me last night, the wife whom you are seeking, the child of whose very existence you are ignorant, are both here under my roof? Why did you not even give me time to tell you the truth when I learned it an hour ago. Did you think I wished to cheat you? Above all, why have you been so needlessly cruel to her? Uncle, I find it hard to forgive you?"

"You find it hard," cried Mr. de Lusignan, all his pent-up passion breaking forth; "will you tell me what I must feel? I who, for the last year, have been cheated into believing this woman my son's widow, and her child his child, when a word would have undeceived me. Last night when we knew you were coming, when

we guessed at last who and what she was, your friend—"his handpointed to Mademoiselle—"did all she could to make her confess, and she failed. Your wife, since she is your wife, had grown hardened in her sin, and would confess nothing—nothing. Why so? Would she not have been dear to us, for your sake? Should I have not loved your boy, Harry?"

"The sin is mine," he answered, colouring deeply. "When I pledged myself to go out with O'Donnell, I was not married, for he would have none but single men, as perhaps you know. The expedition was abandoned, then taken up again, but in the interval Elizabeth had become my wife. If I had acknowledged our marriage the world would have said: He married because the expedition is one of great danger, and his heart failed him at the eleventh hour. Elizabeth sacrificed her liberty-she risked her fair name, to save my honour from doubt. She did what not a woman in a thousand would have done. She let me go, and never tried to keep me, by telling me of my unborn child."

"I agree with you," angrily said Mr. de Lu-

signan; "not a woman in a thousand would have done it—not a woman in a thousand would, whilst by no means sure of her first husband's death, think of a second."

"Uncle," said Harry, with strange gentleness, "passion blinds you. You are attempting a cruel thing—thank God that it is an impossible thing. Neither you nor anyone else in the wide world can shake my faith in the love of this woman. It is no use," he added, with a triumphant smile, "she would have died ten times rather have betrayed my secret, and let a stain fall on my honour! And yet I was thought dead, and, as you say, she thought me dead. As to Mr. Gray, Elizabeth would never have married him."

"And I say she would have married him in a week," interrupted Mr. de Lusignan.

"She would never have married him!" confidently resumed his nephew. "At the eleventh hour, at the foot of the altar, she would have said 'No,' or run away, or done something or other; but she would never have been his wife."

As he said this Elizabeth raised her face from his shoulder, and, looking up him, laughed silently.

"And now," said Harry, with a sigh, "for the second time we part. It is your doing, not mine. I would gladly have rested awhile with you, but how can I? I must go and take away my wife and my child from your keeping."

Mr. de Lusignan did not answer. He listened with a moody face to the joyous shouting of Harry, who was playing somewhere near us, unconscious of the drama going on close by. That boy was not his grandson, and he had known it for some time; but he had not been able to tear him from his heart. He had made the attempt, as I had seen, and he had failed. He loved him still, and could not help loving him. And now the child that was not his, must go from him for ever away, with his resentful and surely much-injured mother.

- "Elizabeth," said Harry, looking down at his wife.
- "You will not go at once," said Mr. de Lusignan, huskily.

Harry looked at his wife again.

"Not a moment, not a second!" she cried impetuously; and turning round, she called in her clear voice:

"Harry, Harry, come here!"

The boy was invisible, but at her call he came running. He rushed towards us, flushed and breathless.

"Oh, grandpa!" he shouted, "I've got a bird —I've got a bird!"

He stood before us with the anxious head of the little prisoner peeping out of his hand, its black, bead-like eyes moving restlessly.

"Let the bird go," said Mr. de Lusignan. His tone was so strange that the boy obeyed mechanically. He opened his hand; with a cry of surprise and joy the bird escaped, wheeled round, then flew away on joyous wing to happy liberty.

"Oh, grandpa!" exclaimed Harry, much dismayed, "it gone—it gone!"

Mr. de Lusignan said not a word. He took up the boy, kissed him very softly, then walked away, without giving any of us a look. The tears were flowing down Mademoiselle's pale cheeks, for Harry and Elizabeth had gone up to her chair and stood arm in arm before her.

"God bless you, Harry!" she said.

Elizabeth slipped her arm from her husband's, and kneeling on the floor of the pavilion, passed her two arms around Mademoiselle.

"I would have told you," she said, "but it was his secret, not mine."

Mademoiselle stooped and kissed her very fondly, but she did not speak.

"We are going to London," said Harry; "can we not see you there?"

Elizabeth took her husband's arm, and moved on, and her eyes did not once fall upon me! I could not bear this. I sprang towards her. I clasped my arms around her neck.

- "Elizabeth, Elizabeth!" was all I could say.
- "Good-bye, my darling," she said very tenderly, and she kissed me again and again.
- "Good-bye!" I echoed. "Oh, Elizabeth, shall we never meet again—never?"
- "Good-bye," she repeated, and kissed me again more kindly than before; then leaning on

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her husband's arm, and taking her child by the hand, she walked away. Mademoiselle rose and followed them slowly, whilst I stood looking after them, nearly blinded by tears.

- "Brown—where is Brown?" cried Miss Russell's irate voice from inside the pavilion. "Wheel me out, Miss Dunn!"
- "Yes, dear," sweetly answered Miss Dunn, "only don't put yourself out."

"I will!" cried Miss Russell, still wrathful. "Do you call that civility, visitors who come to your house to have their tantrums out; and who no more mind you when talking than if you were a stock or a stone? Did I not tell that Mrs. Harry to come in here, on account of her neuralgia, and did she even so much as answer me?"

"Very uncivil," murmured Miss Dunn, wheeling out the yellow chair; and as it went by me, Miss Russell, giving me a look of defiance, exclaimed, at the pitch of her voice,

"I'll have no more visitors, with their flounces and their bounces, I can tell you! I'll have no more visitors!"

I am sorry to have to record such vulgar

words, but you see Miss Russell was a vulgar woman, and being a rich one, laid no sort of restraint on her temper. I wonder how I remembered what she said, for my heart was very full, so full that I was not aware of Mr. Herbert till he stood by my side. I suppose he had met Elizabeth and her husband, for he said to me, "You are crying, Bessie; well, cry, it will do you good, for you have seen your last of Elizabeth."

His voice was so gentle, his look was so kind, that I turned to him with involuntary emotion. He asked for no pledge, and I gave him none but I was his from that moment, and he knew it.

That same afternoon my guardian left Hanvil. Before he went away he said to me:

- "You shall have your way this time, Bessie."
- "My way, sir!"
- "Well, Mr. Herbert's way then," he replied impatiently. "Mademoiselle will see to all that."

This was our parting. Mr. de Lusignan appeared again on my wedding-day, then vanished for years; but he gave me dear Mademoiselle,

and I did not miss him much. Through her, and only through her, Mr. Herbert and I heard of Elizabeth and her husband. I need not tell here the story of Harry de Lusignan. He has written it himself in pages never to be forgotten. Simply and modestly he has told that wonderfultale of adventure, and suffering, and treachery, and late atonement, which thrilled through every heart in the land; but let none seek for the name of Elizabeth in that book. What she bore for his sake, how she would have perished rather than have confessed the secret which she had guarded so bravely and so long, and how, even when all could read through the cobweb, she fought as bravely for it as if it had been the darkest shroud of mystery, her husband has never told; the sin he has forgiven, and the love he remembers still. What more shall I tell? Why, that Mr. Gray slipped through Miss Dunn's fingers after all, and that Miss Russell is the same as ever, and that Polly is very good. As for me, I am a happy woman—need I say more?

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